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Death-Dealer.

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DEATH-DEALER.

THE SHAWNEE SCOURGE;

OR,

THE WIZARD OF THE CLIFFS.

BY ARTHUR L. MESERVE.

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DEATH-DEALER, THE SHAWNEE SCOURGE;

OR,

THE WIZARD OF THE CLIFFS

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-DEALER.

It was a sultry summer day, nearly a hundred years ago.

The heat was almost intolerable, and man and beast sought the cooling shade of the forest, to spend the hours until it should in a measure abate.

Not a breath of air was stirring.

In a leafy covert, a little removed from the right bank of the Scioto, a form lay stretched at full length upon the earth.

One would have needed almost a second glance to have told whether the object was human or brute.

Even then he might have said it was a cross between the two.

At first sight, a Barnum or a Darwin might have gone wild with delight.

The former would have thought that he had stumbled upon a veritable "What-Is-It?"; while the latter would have declared that he had at last found the long-looked-for connecting link between the human and brute creation.

There was the human form, though ungainly in its shape; but covered with hair from the crown of its head to the sole of its feet.

It was indeed a second Esau.

A great mass of bushy hair covered his head, which, from its appearance, had not known the presence of a comb for months.

A beard of the same reddish color as his hair, and with a like unkempt appearance, covered the lower part of his face, and reached up over his cheeks almost to his eyes.

These were small and deep-set, though sharp and piercing, and overhung by eyebrows of the same gigantic pattern as his beard and hair.

A strange and forbidding appearance the man presented about the head, and his form kept it company.

It was covered with the skins of wild animals, worn with the hair-side out, so that at a glance one would have supposed that it was his own natural covering, so much in keeping was it with that about his head.

As he lay there, one could see that his form was crooked and distorted, until it had hardly the shape of a human being.

But still it was not so noticeable as it was when he was upon his feet, and as erect as it was possible for him to be.

His altitude then was not more than five feet, with a monstrous hump upon his shoulders, which, if any thing, made him look shorter than he really was.

A rifle, almost as long as himself, was lying by his side, so close that he could place his hand upon it at a moment's notice.

A huge knife was thrust into his belt, and the hand that rested upon the handle thereof, showed plainly that it had the strength to use it to a purpose when the occasion warranted.

Though that portion of his face which was not covered by a beard was turned to a dark brown, an observer would have said that he was a white man, though a long residence in the forest had almost changed his appearance and his nature.

The name this uncouth person had once borne was Richard Higgins.

But this had been lost or forgotten long ago. His ears had not heard that name for years.

When he had first appeared among the settlers along the river, as he had done in the capacity of scout and Indian-hunter, they had known him simply as Dick.

But as time wore on, another name became attached to him.

The Death-Dealer

The red-skins gave him that, because his hand had slain

more of their number than any other scout west of the mountains.

So he had come to be called Dick, the Death-Dealer, and his real name had been forgotten by any who by chance had ever known it.

Along the whole border there was not a man who could follow a trail as well as he.

It seemed almost as though he possessed the instincts of a bloodhound, for when once upon the scent he never lost it.

No matter how much in their cunning the savages might double upon themselves, they could not deceive him.

He was sure to follow them to their lair, and there obtain the vengeance he sought, if he did not get it before.

Could all the red-skins he had slain rise up before him, the number would have startled him. Yet he had slain none for the mere love of taking life. He hated a red-skin for the cruel deeds he done, yet he never shot one down unless he was engaged in something detrimental to the interests of the settlers.

The savages stood in mortal dread of him, and many were the plans they laid to take his life. But thus far all of them had failed, and he went on with his work as coolly as though danger was a thing unknown.

Slowly the sun declined toward the west, and at last a delicious coolness pervaded the forest, in place of the heat, which had been so oppressive.

The scout felt its influence, and after stretching out his limbs lazily, he arose to a sitting posture, and taking up his rifle, he carefully examined it, to make sure that it was in order.

The scrutiny revealed nothing amiss. It was in the best possible condition, and he felt sure that it would not fail him when he should have need to use it.

"Well, Dick, it's about time that you were tramping," he muttered to himself, as he cast a look westward and saw that the sun had almost touched the tree-tops. "You've got a powerful ways to tramp to-night, and you got to make up for the time you've fooled away here. I wish I felt a little bit clearer in my mind, as to what new deviltry the red-skins are planning now. They're up to something, that's sure. They've

as busy for a day or two back as the devil in a gale of wind. 'They're hatchin' something, and I would give a sixpence if I only knew what it was. I must find out if I can afore they get ready to strike. I wish thar wa'n't but one blamed red-skin in the world, and he stood out yander. We'd jest make an end of him in no time, wouldn't we, Susannah ?'

These last words were addressed to his rifle, which he patted affectionately as though it was a thing of life and understood what was said to it. Then he brought it to his shoulder and glanced along the barrel toward the spot which he had designated for the savage to stand.

At that very instant, as though his wish had been gratified, a savage suddenly appeared on the very spot which he had indicated.

So unexpected was his appearance, that for an instant the scout was startled and sat as motionless in his place as though he was a block of stone.

But the next moment his finger was playing with the trigger of his rifle, and in a second more a bullet would have sped in the direction of the savage, had he not bethought himself of the folly of the act.

A score of red-skins might be close at hand, and if so what benefit would the death of one of them be to him.

The savage had not seen him, therefore he remained motionless, but with the rifle still brought to bear upon him.

For the space of a minute the savage remained upon the spot where he had appeared, gazing about him as though in some way he scented danger, and then he moved on, and the next instant was lost to sight.

No sooner had he disappeared than the scout sprung to his feet, and after listening intently for a moment, as though to catch the sound of other footsteps, he glided swiftly away on the trail.

Hardly had two minutes elapsed from the time he had sprung to his feet, when the bushes were parted, and another savage stepped upon the very spot where the Death-Dealer had lain.

Carefully he bent down and examined the ground, and in a moment was satisfied that it had but just been vacated.

The twigs and wild grass which had been bent down by the weight of the scout's body, were springing up, striving but vainly to stand erect again.

This told him as plainly as words could have done that whoever had lain there was only that moment gone.

The footprints about the spot told him that it was a white man; and evidently the savage felt assured that it could be none other than the Death-Dealer.

A mingled look of joy and rage came over his face, as he glanced eagerly along the trail the scout had left behind him.

Only for the space of a minute did he linger about the spot, and then glided swiftly along the trail which the scout had been at no pains to conceal.

In the mean time Dick had gone out to the spot where the red-skin had disappeared, and, taking the trail, hurried on after him.

That he was on some errand of mischief, and that he was not alone, he felt assured.

From the signs he had seen during the last twenty-four hours, he knew that the savages meant mischief to some of the settlements along the river.

But the exact spot where the blow was to fall he was in ignorance of.

This, by following close on the movements of the savage, who had so suddenly appeared before him, he was in hopes to discover.

He little thought that another savage was watching *his* movements full as closely; and only waiting for a chance to take his life and secure his scalp, which would be prized higher by him than a score of ordinary ones.

It would be no common triumph to boast that he had taken the scalp of the Death-Dealer, the scout most feared in all that region of country.

On went the foremost savage, all unconscious that the terrible Death-Dealer was upon his track.

Straight as an arrow from the bow was his way through the forest, and never once stepping from the trail came the unerring scout.

And close behind him came the other savage, if possible more intent upon his purpose than either of them.

For nearly a mile they went on in this way, and then the foremost savage suddenly paused.

In an instant the scout followed his example, hastily putting the trunk of a tree between them so that his presence might not be discovered.

The next moment the savage uttered a cry so much in imitation of an owl that a less practiced ear than that of the scout might have been deceived by it.

But he knew that it was a signal agreed upon between the savage and his comrade, when he should have reached the place of rendezvous.

Hardly had it died away before its exact counterpart was heard away to the right.

A moment later it was repeated on the left.

The woods were full of savages.

So it seemed to the scout, as he stood there as silent as death.

But as yet, though they came from every side, there were none behind him.

Where the danger to him was the greatest, there was no sign given to put him on his guard.

"Well, this is a lucky hit," he muttered to himself. "All I've got to do is to keep quiet, and I shall find out what the red-skins are up to."

Hardly had the words left his lips when there was a whizzing sound like an arrow cutting the air, and the next instant the deadly shaft was quivering in the trunk of the tree, hardly an inch above his cap.

Glancing quickly about he saw the savage, bow in hand, hardly a dozen paces from where he stood.

The quivering shaft told him that he was discovered, and quick as thought he brought his rifle to his shoulder and ran his eyes along the barrel.

The red-skin saw that he had missed, and turned hastily to cover himself by the trunk of a tree. But he was too late. The finger of the scout was on the trigger of his rifle, and the next instant the bullet it contained was on its errand of death.

The aim was an unerring one, and the leaden messenger did its work well.

With a howl of agony, the savage went down to the earth, never to rise therefrom.

His death-cry was echoed by one of rage on either side. Two others at the same moment had caught a glimpse of the scout, and they closed about him, determined that he should not leave the spot alive.

They felt now that they had the Death-Dealer in their power.

Dick knew that the odds were against him, but he was never more cool or self-possessed in his life.

He had been in a good many snug places before.

With wondrous rapidity he reloaded his rifle, and before it was accomplished a bullet whistled in unpleasant proximity to his ear.

To remain where he was until he was surrounded by the red-skins was no part of his plan. His only safety lay in flight. The only red-skin close upon him could not harm him now, for the barrel of his rifle was empty. With a bound he sprung from behind the tree and fled away.

He got a glimpse of the red-skin reloading his rifle, and had he been so minded he could have sent a bullet through his heart. But he did not care to do it. He wished to keep it against a time when it would do him a better service.

Ill-shaped and deformed as he was, it was wonderful how fast he got over the ground.

His steps were rather bounds than strides, and could a stranger have looked upon him as he fled away through the forest they would have said that it was a wild beast instead of a human being.

With fleet steps, straining every nerve in the race, the red-skins came after him.

But they stood but a poor chance of overtaking him. Their swiftest runners were no match for him in this respect.

He knew that as soon as the sun went down and the twilight came on he was safe.

It would be easy enough to elude his pursuers then.

Just as the sun went down, he paused on the summit of a slight eminence and looked behind for his enemies.

Not one of them was in sight.

But he knew that they were still upon his trail, and it would not be long before they would show themselves, so he waited.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIZARD'S DEN.

ONE, two, five minutes passed, and the scout stood there as motionless as stone, with his eyes fixed back over the way he had come.

He held his rifle before him ready for instant use, the moment a savage should show himself.

He had made up his mind that there should be one the less to keep on his trail.

At last his eye caught sight of a form moving among the trees.

"Now, Susannah, my girl," he said, as he sighted along the shining barrel, and took quick aim upon the foremost savage.

The next instant Susannah spoke, in a tone that woke the echoes of the forest, and the eye of the scout noted the savage as he bit the dust.

"Well done, my girl," he said, caressingly. "Now we'll be going. By that 'ere yell, there's a hull snarl of 'em ahint. Well, let 'em come on if they want to. They'll get a tussle afore they get you and I into their clutches."

Suiting the action to the word, the scout went on again, reloading his rifle as he went; while each moment the dusk of evening grew in the forest, telling him that the end of his race and the night were near at hand.

Ever and anon as he paused for a moment, he could hear the savages coming on behind him, but he had no fear of their overtaking him. In a few minutes more he would be able to turn aside and let them go on in the wild pursuit, while he could stand quietly by and laugh at the trick he was playing upon them.

Deeper and deeper grew the shadows in the forest, and at last the darkness was so well down that it was all that he could do with his eyes, accustomed to the task, to mark the footsteps he was leaving behind him.

The moment had come for him to give them the slip.

Summoning to his aid all the energies he possessed, he bounded forward with the speed of the wind for some fifty rods on the course he had been following.

Here he paused, and listened for a few moments.

As he expected, there was no sound of the footsteps of his pursuers.

Assured of this, he turned abruptly to the right, and, after keeping this course for a few minutes, once more set his face in the direction from which he had come.

A little later, and he heard the sound of the savages' footsteps as they hurried by him.

"Go it, ye varmin's," he muttered, "yer eyes have got to be sharper than I think they are, if ye can keep the run of my trail. Thar ain't nothing like darkness to get a feller out of a fix as I knows on. It has saved you and I, Susannah, more'n a hundred times since we come into these parts."

He patted the breech of his rifle affectionately, as if it was capable of understanding what he said. In truth he was as much attached to it as though it had been a human companion with whom he had spent an equal number of years.

"Well, I'm rid of them. But I ain't a bit wiser than I was an hour ago. I ain't got the least clue to what the varmin's are up to. Thar's something in the wind or there wouldn't be such a snarl of 'em in these parts. There'll be butchering and burning on the river somewhere afore morning, I'm afraid. I wish to mighty I knew where it was that they mean to begin their bloody work."

He was silent for a few moments, turning the matter over in his mind, and trying to determine what he had better do.

"Let me see," he broke out, at length, as he gazed about him, as if for the purpose of taking his true bearings. "That ere Wizard's hole ain't far from here. If he's only in the right time perhaps I can find out something by him. But, he's a crafty old fox and sometimes I think he plays me

false. He pretends to be a friend of the whites—says he tries to keep peace between them and the red-skins. But I've thought sometimes that he set 'em on to their devilish work. At any rate I'll give him a call, and perhaps I can find out something. I'm blind as a bat now, about what to do."

For a few moments longer the scout remained in the attitude of listening, and then he threw his rifle over his shoulder and struck out at a round pace through the forest.

A silence most profound was around him. There was no sign to show that another living being was near. The savages, off the scent, had gone, he knew not whither.

With rapid strides he hurried on, intent upon reaching his destination as soon as possible.

Away to the eastward, the sky was lighting up with the rising moon, then a little past its full. Soon its beams would make it as light as evening in the forest.

For nearly an hour he kept on without once pausing; and at the end of that time there rose before him a high, jagged hill, crowned with splintered rocks, and stunted trees, bathed in the silver rays of the newly risen moon.

He was close upon the dwelling place of him he sought.

In the heart of the hill, beneath the jagged rocks, the Indian Wizard had his home.

Both the white hunters and the red gave the spot a wide berth, for they stood greatly in awe of the strange being who haunted the spot.

Of the former, none had ever held converse with him except the scout, who now stood almost at the threshold of his den.

The red-men consulted him, when any thing of great moment was at stake; but there was not one of them who was not glad when his back was turned upon him.

Sometimes they brought their sick to him to heal, for he was reputed a great Medicine, and his skill was often of great avail.

All this the scout knew well, yet he felt no fear as he approached the spot. He had no fear of the unearthly powers which some said the Wizard possessed.

Arrived at the foot of the hill, the scout paused, and glanced up at the moonlit rocks above him.

No living thing was to be seen, and a silence like that of death brooded around the spot.

"I wonder if the old fellow is asleep?" he muttered. "I've almost forgot the way into his den, and am not sure that I can find it."

At that moment the solemn hoot of an owl coming from the highest pinnacle of the cliff above, broke the silence that reigned around.

"That'll fetch him out," muttered Dick. "That bird serves him better than a red-skin would, perched up there. His eagle watches for him by day and his owl by night, and I'll defy anybody to come round here without their knowing it. I don't see how the old chap has got 'em trained so well as he has. There he goes ag'in. I should think that one such a hoot as that was enough to announce anybody. But hark! Somebody else is coming. I'll be darned if that 'ere bird don't know more than a human."

A footstep only a few rods away had at that moment fallen upon the ear of the scout.

Close beside where he stood was a huge boulder which at some former time had toppled down from the height above, and it was only the work of a moment for him to ensconce himself behind it in such a manner that he would not readily be discovered.

"We won't be hoggish, Susannah," he said, in a whisper, as he placed his rifle so that it would be ready for instant use. "We'll let the Wizard see this visitor first. I don't see who in nater it can be who dares to venture here arter dark."

The footstep came nearer and nearer, and in a few moments the scout caught a glimpse of a figure in the moonlight approaching the spot he had just vacated.

To his astonishment he saw that it was an Indian maiden, and as the moonlight fell full upon her features he saw that she was fair and comely.

"Well, this is the master," muttered the scout. "Who would have thought that the old chap had such visitors as this?"

The Indian girl paused upon the very spot he had so lately vacated, and despite the lack of determination upon her

face, he could see mingled with it, a look of apprehension as though she feared the interview she had evidently come to crave of the Wizard.

For the space of a minute she remained motionless, gazing up toward the spot from whence the hoot of the owl had come. A silence most profound reigned around, and the scout in his hiding-place almost feared that the loud beating of his heart would betray him.

Suddenly a voice came apparently from out of the very rocks, and so close to them, that they both gave a start of surprise.

"Who is it, that seeks the Wizard of the Rocks when the night has come? Let them speak, that he may know their errand at once."

Out from among the rocks as though they had opened to give him egress, strode the once tall form of the Wizard, now bent with years, and the strange life he led. A sort of robe made of the skins of wild beasts covered his gaunt form and fell nigh to his feet. His face was wrinkled and old, but his eyes were as bright and piercing as they had been in his youth. Age and the long life of a recluse had not dimmed them in the least. In one hand he held a long staff, as though to give emphasis to the question he asked. The moonlight falling upon him gave him a weird look, and it was little wonder that those who saw him felt that there was something unearthly about him, and which sent a feeling of awe to their hearts.

"The Indian girl hears the words of the great Medicine. She has come to seek him that she may know of a thing that is dear to her heart. She has come through the forest alone, that no others may hear the words that may be spoken. Will the great Medicine listen to what she has to say?"

"Why does the Indian girl come hither to the Hollow Rocks, and speak with a forked tongue? Let her words be as straight as the flight on an arrow, and they shall be hearkened to. Why does she say that she came hither alone, while the watch-bird up yonder tells that there were two of them?"

"The Indian girl scorns a lie. Her tongue is not forked and she has not told an untruth. She came through the forest alone, and she knows not that others are near."

The Wizard did not speak for a moment, but he fixed his piercing eyes full upon her face. She bore the scrutiny without flinching, and at last as though satisfied of her truthfulness he said:

"The tongue of the Indian is right. The watch-bird needs more training. It has been many moons since he spoke falsely before."

The scout in his hiding-place breathed freer. He did not fear harm if he was discovered, but he had a purpose in remaining concealed for some time longer. Somehow he felt impressed that he might learn something of the errand on which he had come if he remained undiscovered. Besides, he was curious to know why it was that the Indian girl had come hither to hold a conference with the Wizard.

Meanwhile she stood silent, as though waiting for him to question her.

"Let the Indian girl speak," said the Wizard, at length. "Let the daughter of the chief make known her errand."

"Then the Wizard of the Rocks knows the Indian maiden. He calls her the daughter of the chief, and he spoke truly," said the girl, proudly.

"Who has not heard of Minora, the Red Rose of the forest, the daughter of Leaping Panther? Many maidens of the tribe are fair, but none can compare with her. The eyes of Rushing Water have seen it, and his heart is full of her. He has asked her to go to his lodge, and she is willing. Before many moons shall go, the young chief will have carried her thither, and great will be the rejoicing of the tribe."

A strange look of mingled disappointment and hate came over the face of the Indian girl, as these words fell upon her ear.

The scout could see it from his hiding-place behind the rock, and the Wizard noted it from the spot where he stood. Uncertain as the moonlight was, there was no mistaking it.

"The Wizard of the Rocks has heard the idle tale that has been told by the tribe; or it may be that Leaping Panther has told to his ears his hopes for his child. Moons ago this might have been. Rushing Water did woo the Red Rose and asked her to share his lodge with him. But his heart is turned from her now. His love is given to another, and it is of this that the daughter of the chief has come here to-night."

"The Red Rose's words are strange ones. The Wizard of the Rocks can hardly credit the words she utters. Why should Rushing Water break his faith and turn away from her. Where in all the lands of the red-men can he find a mate that can compare with her?"

"Rushing Water seeks not for a mate among his people. His heart is turned away from the maidens of his own race. He has given it into the keeping of a pale-face girl whose lodge stands in the wilderness apart from her people. Minora has seen her often, and she wishes now that her knife had found her heart."

A look of deadly hate was on the face of the girl, and her hand as she spoke nervously sought the spot where her weapon rested.

The scout gave a start, and muttered to himself :

"She means Sam Wilson's cabin ; and little Ruth whom she would like to murder. Well, I'm glad I've found so much out. I guess, Min, you won't get a chance to murder her, and Rushing Water, as you call him, won't find a bride in that quarter. To my sartin knowledge she's promised to Ned Tapley, and he won't be cut out by a red-skin, I don't believe."

"Does the white maiden care for the chief?" demanded the Wizard.

"No. Her heart is given to one of her own race. She will never willingly go to the lodge of Rushing Water."

"That's a fact," muttered the scout. "She's hit the truth once, Susannah."

"Then why need the Red Rose fear, so long as the white maiden cares not for him? Let her do her best to win back the love she has lost."

"The Red Rose can do nothing. The time for her to work upon his heart, has gone by. But when he brings her to his lodge she shall die. Minora has sworn it by the Great Spirit. To-night with his warriors he has gone to fetch his bride. Before the sun comes again the sky will be red with the flames of the burning lodge, and all the pale-faces will die, but her."

The scout gave a start which almost brought him to his feet. He had learned now, whither it was that the red-skins were bound. Little need was there now to consult with the Wizard as he had intended. Everything was plain to him.

He looked eagerly about him for a chance to steal away without being observed, but the moon was shining so brightly that he saw that he could not do it without being observed. So, though anxious to hurry away as soon as possible, he was obliged to remain quiet and listen to the remainder of the conversation.

The Wizard was silent for the space of a minute, and then he said :

"Rushing Water is a foolish chief. He should have chosen for a bride one of his own people. But, why has the Red Rose come hither? What is it that she seeks?"

"The Wizard of the Rocks is wise, and he is a great Medicine. He knows of deadly plants, the juice of which is sure to kill. The Red Rose would have a potion to give to the pale-face maiden when she comes. Let it be safe and sure, so that she shall be sent at once to the spirit-land."

The scout gave another start. He was so nervous now that he could hardly keep in his hiding-place. Yet he thanked his stars that he was where he chanced to be.

"Let the Red Rose go back to her wigwam, and fear not. Rushing Water shall never take the pale-face maiden to his lodge. If it need be, the Indian maiden shall have the deadly potion for which she asks. The Wizard of the Rocks will see to it. Let her have no fears, and she shall yet live in the lodge of the chief."

"The Red Rose is content. She knows that the great Medicine will keep his word. When the morrow's eve shall come, will he be at the Indian village?"

"The Medicine has promised. He will be there."

No more words passed between them. The Indian girl turned and disappeared the way she had come, and a minute after, the rocks seemed to open their jagged jaws and swallow the Wizard up again.

CHAPTER III.

THE CABIN CONFERENCE.

THE scout kept quiet until both of them had disappeared, and then he rose up from his cramped position behind the rock.

"Well, this is a pretty go," he muttered to himself. "Both sides have got their plans laid kinder cute. But I guess I shall have a word to say in this 'ere business. Wal, we'll have a reckoning some day. If I could see yer old head up thar among the rocks, I should be tempted to put a bullet through it. I'll be darned if I hain't a good mind to shoot yer owl off his perch, anyway. You thought he was fooling ye, but he wa'n't. I was here myself, all the time. But I guess I'll let him alone. The bird ain't to blame, anyway. Jest git yer p'izen ready for little Ruth if you want to. I guess it will be some time before you'll have a chance to give it to her. It will, anyway, if I and Susannah can get to Sam Wilson's cabin afore the redskins. They've got some the start, but they can't come in. 'Tain't no use. Dick, the Death-Dealer, will get there afore 'em, and if they don't get a good peppering out of yer mouth, Susannah, then I miss my guess. Come on now, for we mustn't let the grass grow under our feet."

Thus addressing his mute companion, Dick threw it over his shoulder, and turning his back upon the abode of the Wizard, he dashed away through the forest at a pace that few could imitate.

Already since the moment when he had been started from his resting-place by the appearance of the first savage that afternoon, he had traversed many miles, a portion of which he had been obliged, as the reader already knows, to run for his life.

Still he felt not the first inclination of weariness, as most any man would have done. His powers of endurance were great, and he had been schooled in the work until it was a second nature with him.

The long rest he had had through the heat of the day was greatly in his favor, and at this moment he would have said that he felt as fresh as he did when he first rose from the earth from his nap.

Of only one thing did he think he stood in need, and that was food.

He had not broke his fast since morning. But he had often gone longer than this without eating, and now there was neither time nor opportunity for him to do so.

He knew that the safety of Sam Wilson and his family depended upon his reaching their cabin as soon as he could.

Over two hours had elapsed since he had given his pursuers the slip, and the distance they were in advance depended upon how much time they had spent in searching for him after they had lost his trail.

But be that as it might, he knew well that he had no time to lose, and therefore he bent every energy to the task of getting over the ground as fast as possible.

The moon had now risen high above the tree-tops, throwing a flood of silver light down into the forest, rendering it in places almost as light as day.

This was very much to his advantage, and aided him in various ways.

It enabled him to avoid difficult places, where his progress would have been slow, and it also served to keep him in a straight line toward the place of his destination.

Never turning from the point toward which his mind was set, the scout went onward.

But one thought was in his mind.

Should he be too late to save his friends from the terrible fate which threatened them?

Over and over again he asked himself this question.

He could only answer it by hoping for the best.

More than once had he warned Sam Wilson to leave his cabin in the forest and take up his abode in some settlement where he would not be so much exposed; but he would not listen to him.

He was as safe in one place as another, he always declared, but now the hour had come when he would find out his mistake.

It was near a half-dozen miles to the nearest settlement, and thus he was as completely cut off from aid as though he were in the heart of the wilderness.

On he went, never for a moment flagging in his pace.

The moon rose higher and higher, and at last he judged from it that midnight was near at hand.

He could not be far from the clearing now. Were the red-skins before or behind him?

The sky as yet gave no evidence of fire near at hand, and though he paused and listened he could not hear the slightest sound.

A calm unbroken by aught reigned around.

But it was always the stillest before a storm.

Would it prove so in this case?

From what he heard that night he could think it would be otherwise.

At last the broad field of moonlight which lay through the trees before him told him that he was close to the edge of the clearing.

A few minutes more and his suspense was at an end.

The cabin stood unharmed in the center of the clearing, and a light gleaming out from the window told him that they had not all retired yet.

"Thank fortin we're in time, Susannah," he exclaimed, as he paused for a moment to wipe the profuse perspiration from his brow. "I wonder what it is that keeps 'em up so late? I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Ned Tapley was here sitting Ruth up. I hope he is, 'cause thar'll be one more shot on our side. Ned can handle a rifle nigh about as well as I can you, Susannah."

He did not lose many moments here, but with long strides he crossed the clearing and approached the cabin. Noiselessly he came up and peered in through the crevice of the window through which the light shone out.

He was right in his surmises. Ned Tapley was seated within, with Ruth's head resting upon his shoulder. His arm was about her waist, and in their happiness they had little thought of the danger which menaced them, or that other eyes than their own were looking upon them.

Dick hugged his rifle close to him.

"They're as loving as you and I," he said to himself. "We've been in pretty 'tarnal tough scrapes afore now, Sussannah, and if signs don't fail they'll be too, afore they're out of this. I hate to disturb 'em but it's got to be done. So here goes."

Suiting the action to the word, he rapped loudly upon the door, bringing the startled lovers to their feet.

"Who is there?" demanded Ned.

"Dick. Open the door and let me in."

"It is the scout," said Ruth. "Where can he have come from at this time of night?"

As Ned could not answer this question of Ruth's, he unbarred the door, giving admittance to the scout that he might reply for himself.

"Come in. I'm glad to see you," exclaimed the young man, grasping him by the hand. "You are the last person that I would have thought of turning up to-night."

"Am sorry to interrupt yer courting, youngster, but it had better be me than somebody else. Anyway I'm glad to see you here. I wish there was a dozen more from the settlement, for I'm afraid we shall need 'em afore morning."

"What do you mean? Is there danger abroad to-night?" demanded Ned, anxiously, while Ruth's hand which she had placed in that of the scout's trembled in spite of her efforts to prevent it.

"Tain't no use to try to deceive you," said Dick, after he had returned the greeting of Ruth. "I ain't got the time, even if I wanted to. Call up Sam and I'll tell you what I know. But first mind that the door is barred strong. There's no telling when the red-skins may be upon us, and it's best to be prepared."

"I'm here," exclaimed the settler, emerging from the other apartment with his rifle in his hand. "What is the matter, Dick? Are the red-skins on the rampage ag'in?"

Ned had been looking to the door, and now he came back again, and all waited anxiously for the scout to speak.

He did not keep them long in suspense, but in as few words as possible he made them acquainted with the danger they were in.

Though the face of Ruth was as white as snow, she c

not cry out, when she comprehended the danger she was in, but the mother who had joined the group in season to hear the burden of the scout's communication gave utterance to her fears.

"Oh, Ruth, my child, what shall be done?" she cried. "I was fearful the other day when the savage was here that you had offended him; but I did not think he would plan so terrible a thing as this."

"I don't know why you didn't," said the scout, bluntly. "You can't trust one of the race half so far as you can see 'em. That I found out long ago. They never enjoy themselves half so much as they do when they are burning, and cutting, and slashing round and raising scalps. That's what they were made for I suppose, and I don't know as they can help it."

"Do you think that they are close at hand?" asked Ned, as he took his rifle from the corner of the room and carefully examined the priming.

"Yes, I expect 'em any moment. It was a wonder that they didn't get here afore me. I guess they hunted longer for my trail than I thought they would. But they had ought to know better by this time, than to think they could catch me arter I've got wind of what they're up to."

"What had we better do?" asked the settler, anxiously. "Stick by the cabin, hadn't we?"

"Yes. It's all the sight we've got. If we run for the woods, like as not we shall stumble right into their clutches. The walls of the cabin ar' thick, and we've got three rifles to help ourselves with. We're safer here than we should be anywhere else."

"But there is another one to help us," said Ruth. "The man up in the loft. He must be sound asleep not to hear us. Had we not better call him?"

"I'm a coming," cried a voice, overhead. "I'll be down thar jest as soon as I can get my legs into my trowsers. Rot the lack, that ain't the right hole anyway. I never could get on my fixin's in the dark. Jerusalem! there goes a gallows-button! Right down through a crack in the floor as sure as preaching, Say, below there! Ye didn't hear it drop, did ye?"

No answer was made to this inquiry, while the scout stared upward for a moment as if in astonishment, and then turned his inquiring gaze into the faces of those about him, as though he was mutely demanding who the stranger was.

But they had no chance to answer him, before a huge pair of feet appeared upon the upper round of the ladder, followed by a pair of legs so long that Dick began to wonder if any body would follow at all. But it did at length, crowned by a head, and the whole of the stranger was revealed to his wondering gaze.

Long and lank, it seemed to Dick as though he must be at least seven feet in height. He had only stopped to half clothe himself, and the rest of his garments he carried upon his arm. His face was sharp and thin, and the lower part of it was covered with a long, thin beard, which stuck out in every direction like the quills of a porcupine. His eyes, which were small and restless, had a sharp look about them, and his tone and twang proclaimed him at once to be a Yankee.

If the scout gazed upon him curiously, the new-comer returned it with interest. Evidently he had never seen such an extraordinary figure as that presented by the scout. Evidently he wished to make some remarks upon him, but he contented himself with a single exclamation

"Whew!"

"Who are you?" demanded Dick, a little impatient of the scrutiny the other had bestowed upon him, forgetting that he himself had been guilty of the same.

"Wal, I don't mind telling ye," answered the Yankee, as he went on with his toilet. "My name is Peleg Parker, and I hail from New Hampshire. I was raised in Pigwacket, right up under the shoulder of the White Mountains. I couldn't make money fast enough up there, and so I took to peddling, and so wandered away out into these 'ere parts. My pack is up in the garret, and I've got as good an assortment in it as ever was seen this side of the mountains. Perhaps I can trade a little with ye in the morning? Will sell cheaper than dirt. There didn't any of you see that button drop down here, did ye? I wouldn't lose it for a fourpence, for I couldn't match it out in these parts."

Mrs. Wilson replied in the negative, and then Ned Tapley said :

" You don't know, perhaps, the danger we're in. We're expecting every moment that the savages will attack the cabin."

" I know it, and I'm worried nigh about to death about my pack. If the red-skins get hold on it I'm ruined. My hull fortin is in it—ev'ry darned cent I'm worth. Say, Mister, you don't think they can break in here, do you?"

This was addressed to Dick, who replied somewhat angrily :

" I wouldn't wonder if they did. They'll do their best to, at any rate. You had better worry about yer scalp than about that 'ere pack o' your'n. If you wa'n't asleep when I came here, you wouldn't ask such a question as that."

" Asleep! I'll be darned if I've slept a wink to-night. I knew the young folks were courting down here, and it put me in mind of the time when I used to be in that business myself. I've courted more'n a dozen gals, off and on, up in New Hampshire, and nigh about every one of 'em give me the mitten in the end."

" I don't wonder at it," muttered the scout.

" Wal, I thought of 'em down here for a good while, and got a-wondering if I couldn't sell 'em a good bargain out of my pack if they were going to housekeeping, and then I rolled over and was just going to sleep, when you made that thundering racket at the door. And now here I am up ag'in without having got a wink of sleep to-night."

" You'll be lucky if you ever do again," muttered the scout.

" If we can't keep the red-skins out of here, you've taken your last nap and cheated the last one you ever will."

The Yankee was about to make some rejoinder to this, when Sam Wilson broke in :

" This won't do for us to stand talking here. We must keep a watch without. I will go up into the loft and station myself at one of the loopholes there. We mustn't let the red-skins get up under the walls of the cabin unless we want to be smoked out."

" I will go," said Ned, making a move toward the ladder. " Do you stay here and make ready for their coming. I'll

keep my eyes open, and give the alarm the first glimpse I get of them."

"I swan, I wish I was in New Hampshire," exclaimed Peleg. "I'll bet a dollar that 'ere pack will go afore I get out of this scrape."

"What have you got for weapons?" demanded the scout, sharply. "We shall have need of every thing in that line afore morning. Have you got a rifle?"

"How in the name of Jerusalem do you think I can carry a rifle along with a pack? I guess you never was in the peddling line, was ye?"

"No."

"So I thought. And jest at this time I wish I wa'n't neither. I guess it would be money in my pocket if I was out of this scrape."

"But what have you got?" demanded the scout, impatiently. "Any pistols?"

"Yes, a pair of beauties up in my pack. But I don't want to dirt 'em up in this scrape if I can help it. I calculated to make a good thing out of 'em when I found the right customer."

Dick gave utterance to something which sounded very much like an oath.

"You've got a customer for 'em now, and if you save yer scalp in the trade you'll make the best bargain you ever did. Bring them down and load them up at once. We ain't got a moment to lose in getting ready."

With evident reluctance the Yankee turned away and clambered once more up to the loft. It took him some little time to search them out in the dark, but when he returned he had them in his hands.

The scout took them from him, for the purpose of examining them to see if they were properly loaded and in good order.

"Come," said Peleg. "What will you give me for 'em? I'll sell 'em 'tarnal cheap. Speak out. I stump you to make me an offer."

The sound of footsteps was heard above their heads, and the next moment the excited face of Ned was thrust down through the opening.

"They are coming; a half-score of them at least are crossing the clearing."

Mrs. Wilson and Ruth grew paler if possible than before, while Sam and the scout exchanged glances, which told of the apprehension they felt. As for the Yankee, he only muttered:

"Darn it, why couldn't they have waited a minute longer. They've sp'iled a trade."

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR AGAINST FORTY.

It was only for a moment that the look of apprehension remained upon the face of the scout. Then it vanished and a look of stern determination took its place.

"Look well to the door, Sam," he said. "There's a crack there atween the logs by it, and if you get a good chance give 'em a shot that will tell. I'll go up with Ned, and if we don't pick off a couple of 'em at least afore they get here, why we'll make some bad shots, that's all."

"What shall I do?" said the Yankee. "Keep the wimmin folks company?"

"Stay here with Sam, and if you find a chance to use them shooters, why do it," said Dick, as he bounded up the ladder, and felt his way along to the spot where Ned Tapley was kneeling before a loophole which had been left between the logs for the very purpose for which it was now employed.

"Look," said the young man, moving aside so as to give him a chance to peer into the outer world. "There is more of them than I thought. As near as I can make out there is a good two score of them."

"So there is," said Dick, as he glanced hastily through and noted the red-skins that as silently as so many spirits of evil were gliding toward the cabin.

"Rushing Water has got half his warriors with him. I

guess. He don't mean to fail in this thing if he can help it."

"And I am afraid that he will not," said Ned, in a low tone. "How can we ever contend against such a horde as that which is pouring down upon us."

"If the cabin walls only prove true to us, we will make a good fight, and send howling away what we don't leave stretched out about us. So here goes for one of 'em, Susannah. Mind, old gal, that you do yer duty."

He thrust the muzzle of his rifle out between the logs and ran his eye along the barrel. Taking good aim upon the foremost savage, he pulled the trigger. There was a report and the savage lay stretched upon the earth.

A shout of rage burst from the throats of the savages, making the echoes of the forest ring on every side.

"There's one of them gone under," said the scout, exultingly. "Hear them howl. But they shall have a chance to again before we are done with them. Now, Ned, here is a chance for you."

He moved aside, hastily reloading his rifle as he did so, and the young man took his place. A glance without showed him that the savages had widely separated, and were hurrying at the top of their speed toward the cabin.

They knew that when once beneath its walls that the marksmen within would not have the chance upon them that they had now.

Ned singled out one of them, and brought his rifle to bear upon him. The next instant, and the messenger of death sped forth upon its errand of destruction, and when the smoke cleared away he saw the savage lying motionless upon the field.

Another moment, and Sam's rifle spoke from beneath them, and glancing out Ned saw that he, too, had been successful.

The scout's rifle was reloaded now, and Ned hastily moved away to give him another chance. But, it was too late. The field between the cabin and the clearing was emptied of savages, except those who would never move again. They had gained the shelter of the cabin walls, and each felt a shudder run through his frame, as he thought how near the

savage horde was to them, and only the walls of their little fort between them and destruction.

Were it not for the helpless women, and the terrible fate which threatened Ruth, they would hardly have given their situation a thought. Both had been in a tight fix before, and this time if it was fated that they were to go under, why they would do so with the best grace they could. But they would not give up so long as they had life and strength left them.

Dick withdrew his rifle and stepped back from the loophole.

"Stay here, Ned, and keep a good look without. It may be that you will get a shot at one of the varmints by and by when they are getting kinder keener. I'll go down and see what Sam and that long-legged Yankee are up to. To my mind the red-skins will be trying the door afore long. There! I knew they would."

As he uttered these words, the flooring beneath their feet trembled, and there came a sound from the outside as though a blow had been dealt with great force against the cabin.

Hurriedly Dick descended the ladder, and joined Sam, whose form he made out standing by the door.

The light had been extinguished so that the savages could not see what was passing within the cabin.

The darkness hid the forms of Ruth and her mother, and that of the Yankee was invisible.

"Well, Sam, how goes it?" he demanded, in a low tone.

"Well, so far," returned the settler. "I've done for one of 'em, and you and Ned for two more. They've tried the door once, but they did not stir it a peg. I should think a half dozen of them threw themselves against it at once."

At that moment another blow fell upon it, causing it to start back a little, for the instant; only to firmly resume its place when the force of the blow was spent.

"It stands it bravely," exclaimed the scout. "They've got to put on more force than that if they break in here. I guess you built that door, Sam, for jist such a time as this."

"I hope they won't get in," exclaimed a voice from a dark corner of the apartment. "If they should and carry off my pack, I'm a ruined man. Say, mister, what will you give me for it now, and take yer chances?"

"You had better worry about yer scalp than that pack of your'n," returned the scout. "If you lose that, I don't think yer knick-nacks will amount to much to ye."

"Oh dear, I wish I was in New Hampshire! What a 'tar-nal fool I was to come out here anyway! Aunt Betsey alwa's told me that a rolling stone gathered no moss. I wish I had set down as flat as the big rock in the sheep-pasture afore I had come out here. Jerusalem! but I da believe they will stave the house down."

Another blow had fallen upon the door with such tremendous force, that it had started a little inward, throwing down the barricade of movable articles which had been piled against it to help strengthen it, making such a clatter that the Yankee asked if the side of the cabin was falling in.

But still the door was not driven from its place, and hastily the two men went to building up the barricade again.

"They used a log of wood that time," said Sam. "But they have got to deal it a heavier blow than that, before they will batter it down. I may be mistaken, but I think it is good for all they can bring against it."

"I hope so," said Dick. "But they are in earnest about getting in here, and I'm afraid they will, some way. Rushing Water will tear this cabin to pieces, but what he will get Ruth into his hands."

"But while I live; or so long as one log lays upon another, he shall never have my child," said the settler, in a low, determined tone.

"And I say amen to that," said Dick, fervently. "The Death Dealer has not gone under yet, and while he has life he will not leave her."

"Heaven bless you," said the settler. "Had it not been for you we should have been butchered by this time, and Ruth in their power."

Again and again the blows descended upon the door, but it resisted them stoutly, and at last the savages apparently made up their minds they could not gain an entrance in this way.

Therefore the blows ceased, and for the space of five minutes not a sound came from without.

Mrs. Wilson and Ruth came forward from the spot where they had been anxiously waiting the course of events.

"What means this silence, father?" said the latter, in a low tone. "Do you think they have given it up and gone away?"

"Gi'n it up? No, not by a jug-full," exclaimed the scout, speaking before the settler could answer. "I tell you they won't give it up so easily. They're planning some new sort of deviltry. That's what they're up to. I know the varmints pretty well and they won't leave this spot in a hurry unless we make it too hot to hold 'em, and the chances are that they'll make it too *hot* for us. Thar, Ned's picked off another of 'em, I'll be bound."

The report of a rifle rung out above their heads, and hardly had it died away before the voice of Ned was heard summoning the scout to him.

Dick bounded up the ladder, and in a moment was at his side.

"What is it?" he asked, eagerly.

"Look. They're going to see what fire will do to us."

The scout uttered an exclamation of alarm, and bending down, peered out through the loophole. A glance showed him that the words of Ned were true.

A huge stack of straw, which stood a little way off, had been brought and heaped against the side of the cabin.

This he saw at a glance, and the next moment all was darkness without.

The moon had managed to struggle for a moment through the great mass of black clouds which had suddenly covered the sky, giving signs that a thunder-storm was close at hand.

It was under the cover of these, that they had heaped the combustible material against the walls of the cabin, and Ned had not been able to see what plan they were preparing to carry out, until they had well-nigh done their work.

One of them he had caught a glimpse of as the last armful was being carried, and had sent a bullet crashing through his head.

"What is to be done?" asked Ned in a whisper. "They will fire the straw in a moment now, and the roof of the cabin, owing to the heat, must be as dry as tinder."

"We must be smoked out like a coon in a hollow tree"

answered the scout. "When it comes to that we must go out and fight hand to hand for our lives."

"It will be a fearful odds."

"I know it. But we must take them. At least they shall know that the Death-Dealer is here, and he will not go under until he has made a half-dozen of them bite the dust."

"They have fired the straw," cried Ned. "I can smell the smoke—and look—see the light flashing in through the crevices here. The cursed red-skin would burn up her, whom he would have for his bride."

It was even as he said. The crackling of the flames outside could now be heard, and all along the side of the cabin the light was flashing in through the slight crevices between the logs. A danger more terrible than any which had before threatened them was upon them now.

In a minute more the loft was so full of smoke that they could not stay there.

Feeling their way to the ladder they descended to the apartment below, where they found their friends also aware of the new danger that threatened them.

"Jerusalem and the Prophets," cried the Yankee. "That pack of mine will be burned up as sure as preaching."

No heed was paid to this lament, and Sam Wilson exclaimed:

"The red skins are trying a new dodge, are they. Do you think they can make the cabin burn?"

"I am afraid so," answered the scout, and then he told them what they had taken to kindle the flames with.

The roaring of the flames could now be plainly heard as they leaped up the side of the cabin.

"If it catches upon the roof there is no hope for us," said the settler, despondingly.

"It is there already," cried Mrs. Wilson, who was gazing up through into the loft. "Father in heaven help us, for we can do nothing of ourselves. Put forth Thy hand and save us from this terrible fate."

A shout arose from the throats of the savages at that moment; but as though in answer to her prayer, a loud clap of thunder resounded above their heads, drowning the shouts of their enemies. The scout uttered a joyful exclamation.

"That sound does my heart good," he cried. "If the rain will only come down in ten minutes we are saved."

"The cabin will be one mass of flames before that time," cried Ned. "The flames have caught upon the roof and it is blazing like tinder. Pray Heaven that the rain may come at once."

"Amen," responded all.

The flames roared and surged without, half drowning the exultant shouts of the savages, who now felt sure of their victims. The smoke poured into the cabin through every crevice, until it was all they could do to breathe. Still though the thunder-peals sounded nearer, the wished-for rain held aloof, as though on purpose to tantalize them and augment their fears.

"Lie down close to the floor," cried the scout. "You can breathe better there. If it don't rain in three minutes' time, we must trust ourselves to the red devils outside."

They obeyed his direction, but hardly had they stretched themselves out before they were startled by an object which came down from the loft and went bouncing across the floor.

Before they could make up their minds what it was, another object came crashing down upon them.

It was the Yankee and his pack.

He had gone up for it, fearful that the fire might consume it before it fastened upon him.

Come what would he was bound that they should go together.

"Jerusalem and the Prophets, I'm killed, I know I am Plague take the smoke. I missed the top round and down I come kerwollups."

"You have nigh about killed me, anyway," exclaimed Sam. "You fell right acrost my back. I hope you'll be able to take that pack to the other world with you."

"Sho! you don't say so. Well, I can't say—"

What more he would have said there is no knowing, but the smoke just then set him into a fit of coughing, so the rest of it was lost.

It was a terrible moment.

Above and around them the red flames were crackling;

their forked tongues eating their way into where they were. Without, the howling savages were waiting for them to come forth to meet as terrible a fate.

Nothing could save them but the prayed-for rain from heaven.

Would it never come?

Were they surely doomed to death?

It would seem so.

At last the scout cried, chokingly:

"Open the door. We may as well die one way as another. We can't live longer here."

At that moment, when all indeed seemed lost; when there appeared no other alternative but to throw themselves out upon the savages, a new sound broke upon their ears.

The floodgates of heaven were at last unloosed, and the rain was descending in torrents.

Never was rain more welcome to human beings than to them.

"Heaven be thanked, we are saved!" cried Sam Wilson, joyously. "The fire can't stand such a flood as this."

"That it can't," exclaimed the scout. "We're all right now and the red-skins are balked ag'in."

For a few moments the rain and the flames fought for the mastery, and then the latter succumbed.

It was no match for its opponent, and in a few minutes the battle was over.

The settlers were saved from danger by the fire.

Silently they stood grouped together, listening to the war-ringing of the elements without, and wondering what had become of the savages.

They had no sign to tell them what they were about.

They did not believe they had given up the errand which they had come, and departed.

They all knew the nature of the savages too well to expect that.

Sam Wilson demanded of Dick what he thought they were up to.

"Planning some other deviltry, no doubt. They ain't far off. I shouldn't wonder if they had took to the forest for shelter till the shower is over."

"Heaven grant that they may not return again," said Mrs. Wilson.

"But they will. You can bet on that," answered the scout. "But where does this water come from, Sam? I didn't know that your cabin leaked like this."

"It did not. The fire must have burned the roof away, and so let it in."

The rain was pouring down upon them in torrents as though there was indeed no covering above their heads.

The scout gave a quick start, as this idea of new danger was forced home to his mind.

"If the roof is burned away we can't stay here," he cried. "Stay where you are, and I will try and find out."

He moved away from them, and they heard him feeling his way up the ladder.

Not three minutes had passed before he was back again.

"Well?" said Sam Wilson, anxiously.

"*Half of the roof is burnt to a cinder, and part of it has tumbled in!*"

His words struck to their hearts like ice.

"What is to be done?" said Ned, almost in a tone of despair. "If this be so, we can't keep the savages out, the moment they discover how matters stand."

"And then my pack will be gone, as sure as preaching," groaned the Yankee, who had stood with his hand upon it, ever since he had tumbled down from the loft.

"Yes, they'll be pouring in upon us thicker than the lice of Egypt. I can't see but one way. We've got to get out of this shell as soon as we can."

"Where can we go? The moment we go out we fall into the hands of the red-skins."

"Perhaps not. I've got it into my head that they ain't hanging round here now. They ain't further off, I'll allow, than the edge of the forest, but I don't believe that they are standing out here taking this pelting. At any rate we've got to find out, and that's no time to lose in doing it."

"How are we to know?" asked Ned.

"*I'm going out to see,*" answered the scout, coolly.

An exclamation of surprise broke from the lips of each of the group.

"You will go to your death if you do," said Sam Wilson.

"And death will come to all of us if we stay here," said Dick. "If we can get across the clearing into the edge of the woods without the varmints knowing it, our sight will be enough better than to stay here. I don't believe there's a savage near us, and now is our time. The rain may stop any moment and then it will be too late. It ain't lightened any lately, and 'cording to that the shower is passing off. Keep quiet here till I come back. If I have good luck I won't be gone long."

He turned toward the ladder, instead of the door as they expected.

"How are you going out?" called Ned after him.

"Through the roof. There's a hole big enough there to let out a giant. If you hear three knocks upon the door you can open it, and let me in. All will be right then."

They held their breath to listen. They heard him for a moment moving about upon the floor of the loft, and then the beating of the rain drowned all further sound.

CHAPTER V.

OUT INTO THE DARKNESS.

It was by the sense of feeling alone, that Dick went up the ladder and moved along the loft with a cautious step.

The darkness was so great that it could almost be felt.

Only here and there above his head, a dull, red light shone on the charred beams, telling that a trace of the fire still lingered there.

But the coals were dim, and gave out no light to serve as a guide to his footsteps.

The rain had well-nigh extinguished them, and if it continued for a few minutes longer they would go out in deeper blackness.

Slowly the scout moved along until he came to r

where the rain came down without hindrance upon his head.

Feeling with his outstretched hands in the darkness, he found that the aperture in the roof at this point was sufficiently large to admit of his passing through without any difficulty.

Thrice he made the attempt, but each time was unsuccessful. The charred wood was not strong enough to support his weight, and it gave way, letting him back again.

But the fourth time he got a firmer hold and drew himself out upon the roof:

The rain seemed to beat down upon him with redoubled fury, as though it meant to drive him from his perch.

But he did not care for this. His only solicitude was for fear that the roof between him and the caves was not strong enough to hold him, and that he would fall through into the loft again.

Slowly he moved down over the inclined plane.

It was no easy job to keep his hold good, and at the same time make sure that the roof was strong enough to bear his weight.

The rain made it slippery, and had it not been for the action of the fire upon the timbers of which it was composed, he could never have kept good his hold there.

But slowly and carefully he went on, and at last drew close to the caves.

It was something like ten feet to the earth, but this was nothing for him to leap down.

On more than one occasion when his life was threatened, he had leaped more than double that distance.

He was close to the edge of the roof now, and was preparing himself for the spring.

He tried to peer down into the darkness to see if the coast was clear of enemies, but the gloom was so dense that he could not see an arm's length before his face.

At that instant, as luck would have it, a pale flash of lightning lighted up the scene for a moment.

The scout used his eyes well, and thereby made a discovery.

The ground about the cabin was free from savages, ex-

cept at one point, where a single one stood wet and forlorn.

Evidently he had been left to watch the cabin while his comrades sought shelter in the forest until the rain should be over.

It was a wonder that he caught a glimpse of the savage, for he was immediately beneath him, and had he sprung down he must have landed directly upon his head.

The flash was gone in a moment, and then if possible it was darker than before.

For a minute the scout was undecided what to do.

He could not retreat up again over the roof, the way was so difficult; and if he could, it would amount to nothing for him to do so.

There was but one feasible course before him, and that he decided upon.

It was to leap down upon the head of the unsuspecting savage, bear him to the earth and slay him before he could utter a sound of alarm.

Taking his knife from his belt, he placed it between his teeth, and then fixing his hands firmly upon the eaves he was ready for the spring.

For only an instant did he hesitate, and then he went down upon the unsuspecting savage, whose first intimation of danger was the full force of the descending scout upon his head and shoulders.

No one taken at such a disadvantage could resist the shock, and the red-skin went down to the earth as suddenly as though the cabin itself had fallen upon him.

He tried to utter a cry of alarm, but it died away before his lips could give it utterance.

The fingers of the Death-Dealer were upon his throat with a grip like iron, and he could utter no sound.

Another moment, and the scout had his knife in his right hand, ready to strike a fatal blow.

The savage struggled fiercely, but he was like a child in the hand of his enemy.

The opportunity the scout sought came soon. The breast of the savage was exposed, and he drove the knife to the hilt in his heart.

Coolly wiping the blade upon the garments of the savage, Dick rose to his feet and quietly listened.

Not a sound met his ear except the beating of the rain and the distant rumble of thunder away to the eastward.

"I wonder if thar is any more of the varmints sneaking round here," he said to himself. "It looks light up thar to the westward, and the rain will be over soon I guess. I wish there would be another bit of a flash, so that I might get another glimpse of matters round here."

Hardly had the thought been expressed, when as though in answer to his desire, another pale gleam of lightning lighted up the scene about him.

It was only momentary; but the scout used his eyes well, and was convinced that there was no savage near except the one whose corpse lay bleeding beside him. But he knew that the moment the rain held up a little they would be back again. From the looks of the sky he felt assured that they had only a few moments that they could call their own, and that they must bestir themselves if they hoped to escape.

Hastily he passed round the cabin to make assurance doubly sure, and then he approached the door and gave the three low raps upon it; the signal they had agreed upon.

They heard it, for he could hear them removing the barricade inside, and in a little time he heard the voice of Sam Wilson demanding as he opened the door a little way:

"It is you, is it not, Dick?"

"Of course it is. Open the door. There's no danger jest now."

The settler complied, and the scout stepped within and the door was immediately closed behind him.

"Are the savages gone?" demanded Ned.

"Yes, that is, they are now. I didn't find but one of 'em there, and I fixed him so that he won't trouble us ag'in. I guess it puzzled him a little to think where I come from when I landed on his head. But I did not give him a great while to think about it, afore he had a touch of my knife, which done for him so far as this world is concerned."

Mrs. Wilson and Ruth shuddered. It made their blood run cold to hear him talk so coolly of what to them, despite the circumstances seemed almost like murder.

"And you still think that we had better leave the cabin?" said Ned.

"Of course. If we stay here a half hour longer we can't call our ha'r our own. It will be hanging to the belt of some of the red-skins. Get ready as soon as ye can. Don't take any thing to weigh ye down for we shall have all we can do to get away with our lives I'm afraid."

"I shall take my pack," cried the Yankee. "You don't think I'll leave that behind, do ye? I had rather leave my ha'r than that. I might get money enough to buy a wig, but I could never get a new pack ag'in."

"Take it if you want to," growled Dick; "but I'll bet a dollar that the red-skins will have the ransacking of it afore you're out of this scrape. I believe you think more of that bundle than you do of any thing else in the world."

"I guess you're right," chuckled the Yankee. "I do think a master sight of it. Nigh about as much as I should of a wife if I had one. But I'll be deuced if I ain't afraid that the rain will spile every thing there is in it. Say, mister, hadn't we better wait 'till it holds up a little?"

"Can't you hold that tongue of your'n?" cried the scout, angrily. "I never saw such a thing to wag in my life. Stay behind if you want to, and make a dicker with the red-skins if you can. Pass me Susannah, Ned, I believe it was you that took her when I went up."

"Who is Susannah?" inquired the Yankee. "I didn't know that there was any lady here by that name. Oh! it's yer rifle, is it? I swan, I never heard a gun called by that name afore."

Each in obedience to the scout's commands prepared to leave the cabin.

Hastily Mrs. Wilson and Ruth donned their outer garments so that in a measure they might be protected from the rain.

They could take nothing with them. All they possessed they must leave behind to the savages.

But they gave no thought to this. Could their lives but be spared they would be content.

A few moments sufficed to make them ready for their flight, and then the scout laid his hand upon the door and opened it a little way.

"Come," he said, quickly. "The clouds are breaking and the rain will be over in a minute. We haven't got a moment's time to spare."

He stepped out into the darkness, followed by Ned, who held the hand of Ruth in his own. Mrs. Wilson came next, and after her the Yankee with his pack upon his back. The settler came last, closing the door of his home behind him with a sad heart. It was not likely, he thought, that he would ever set foot over its threshold again. Once in the hands of the savages they would not leave it until it was a mass of blackened embers.

"Fasten it if you can in some way," said the scout, in a whisper. "I don't want them to know that we are gone, if they get here within the next ten minutes."

There was no way to do this upon the outside, the settler said. The scout hesitated for an instant. If he had felt sure of the time, he would have gone within, made it fast, and come out by way of the roof as he had done before. But he dared not do it, so he said:

"No matter, let it go. Perhaps they won't think to try the door as soon as they get back. Follow me close and don't speak above a whisper. We don't know how near we may come to the red-skins in crossing the clearing. There's a chance that we may run full into 'em. But we won't take that so long as there is another. Come on, I'm afraid of them clouds up yonder where the moon is. If they break away and it comes out bright and clear afore we get to the edge of the woods it will be bad for us. If the red-skins get their eye upon us our chances will be slim."

It was the shortest distance to the woods upon the south, but the scout did not start off in that direction. He thought, and wisely, that the savages would have fled to the nearest point for shelter when the rain drove them from the cabin. Therefore he bent his steps in the opposite direction, while the other fugitives followed close at his heels, hoping that the cover of the forest might be gained in safety before the moon by breaking forth should reveal them to their enemies.

Eagerly they pressed forward as fast as they were able. Despite the symptoms the moon gave of breaking through the clouds, it was still intensely dark. The way was rough, in

some places over fallen trees, and here they found it impossible to make the time they hoped to do. Hardly a word passed between them, and when they did open their lips the words they uttered were hardly above their breath. Each felt how much depended upon secrecy and expedition, and therefore they used every caution which was in their power.

"Courage," whispered the scout. "In three minutes more we shall be safe. I can see the dark line of the woods now, right ahead of us."

Hardly had the words left his lips before through a rift in the dark clouds a flood of moonlight passed down, revealing the clearing and all it contained almost as plainly as the sunlight would have done.

"Quick! for your lives!" exclaimed the scout, as he broke into a run; but before either of them had gained the shelter of the forest, a fierce war-whoop behind them told that they were discovered.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIDNIGHT AMBUSH.

A CRY of terror and despair broke from the lips of Ruth and her mother, as the shout of the savages fell like a knell of death upon their ears.

"Hush! keep quiet as you hope for your lives," cried the scout, in a thrilling tone. "It may be that they ain't seen us arter all. Who knows but what they g'in that shout when they got back to the cabin? We had ought to thank our stars that we ain't back there now."

Dick looked backward as he said this, hoping that the words he uttered might be true, though he felt sure that they need not hope for any such good luck. That glance showed him how frail his hopes were. Between them and the cabin he could see nearly a score of human forms coming swiftly in their direction. As ill-fortune would have it, the moon had shone out a few moments too soon, and an evil chance had revealed them to the savages at that selfsame moment.

But, the moonlight did not linger long over the clearing. As if content with the mischief it had done, it hid its face again behind the clouds and a deeper gloom than before took its place.

"Courage," cried Dick, urging them onward. "They've got to have sharp eyes if they can find us in the forest afore daylight comes. Strike off here to the left a little. We can fool them now if the moon don't come out ag'in."

"Darn it all, I wish I was to hum," muttered the Yankee. "If I was only up in New Hampshire I'd give a dollar. I sw'ar I would now."

The movement of the clouds over the face of the moon favored them, and they were well in the shelter of the forest before it showed itself again.

It was so dark here that they could hardly see their hand before their face; but the scout did not allow them to pause for an instant, though they almost had to feel their way along. Yet though they made the best time they could, their pace was slow, for they had as it were to feel their way along. Haste would only expose them to more danger, for they would be liable to make some sound which would betray them. The snapping of a twig might convey to the savages the knowledge of their whereabouts, and expose them to capture or instant death.

For some twenty minutes after they had gained the shelter of the forest, they kept on in this way, and then, in a low tone, the scout bade them pause.

Each stood motionless in their tracks, their ears strained to the utmost to catch the faintest sound of their pursuers.

A silence as profound as that of the grave was around them. The forest seemed to be holding its breath in expectancy.

The savages, if they were following them close, were doing so with noiseless feet, for not the slightest sound could they catch on either side.

After a silence the scout spoke again:

"We're all right now for an hour or two," he said. "Unless they stumble over us, they can't find us more than they can a weasel in a wall. Should the moon come out bright they may strike our trail and follow it, but I hardly think

they can. But they will do their best as soon as the sun comes up. But by that time we must be a long way from here toward the settlement. Rushing Water thought he was sure of the gal when he see us, but he'll find out afore he's through that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"That's what old Sal Fisher used to say up in New Hampshire," said Peleg. "She—"

What it was she said the company did not learn, for the scout broke in with :

"Keep that tongue of your'n still, will ye? It's wuss than a clapper to a bell; and I shouldn't wonder if it brought the Lull tribe of savages down upon ye. Follow me ag'in, and don't one of ye speak above a whisper."

The Yankee muttered something in so low a tone that none of the rest of them understood what it was; and they all moved forward in the wake of the scout, who notwithstanding the darkness seemed familiar with every step of the way, far more so than did the settlers who for years had lived so close to where they were.

The hand of Ruth was yet in that of her lover, and though it still trembled with fear, the words which he ever and anon whispered in her ear, went far to reassure her and to give her courage.

Sam Wilson walked by the side of his wife, and behind them bringing up the rear came Peleg Parker with his pack upon his back.

And so for an hour they went on, plunging deeper and deeper into the forest, and leaving as they fondly hoped their enemies behind them.

Were they unable to find their trail before daylight, they were in hopes to be so far on their way toward the nearest settlement, that they would have no trouble in making their escape.

Now and then the moon would break through the clouds, deluging the forest with a flood of silver light, and then it would hide its face again leaving the night blacker than it was before.

The scout knew well that a savage, even, could not follow a trail under these circumstances, and with every minute

they remained unmolested his spirits rose and he felt more sanguine of their escape.

Nearly an hour had passed, and they had kept steadily on their way; when suddenly the scout who had glanced behind them, as the moon broke forth brilliantly, bade them pause in their tracks.

"What is it? Did you see any thing?" demanded Ned Tapley, in a low tone.

"*Hist! the red-skins are close behind us!*" he answered, in a low voice.

A thrill of alarm and fear struck to the heart of each at these words.

After all their hopes of escape, were they doomed to destruction?

"Are you sure it was savages you saw?" asked Sam Wilson, in a whisper, as he cast a glance backward over the way they had come.

"Yes. There is one if not more upon our track. I saw him dart behind a tree as plainly as I can see you now. Most like there are others along with him though I did not see them."

"What are we to do?"

"Circumvent the varmints if we can. I know some of their tricks, and I'm going to to play 'em off on them. The moon will be under a cloud ag'in in a minute and then I'll see what can be done. Till then let's keep on as we've been going."

They went on for perhaps a dozen rods, and then the forest was buried in darkness again.

"Now is our time," exclaimed the scout. "I'll let these red skins know that Dick, the Death-Dealer, is on their track yet. He's sent a great many of 'em under, and he ain't got through with the business yet. You, Sam, go slowly on with the wimmen, and Ned you come with me. You are a good shot and it maybe that I shall have need of you."

"You don't want me, I expect," said Peleg. "I never was very good at fighting, and besides I've got this ere pack to see to. If the red skins get hold on it, I'm ruined eternally."

"No, I don't want you," answered Dick. "Stay where

you are, and try to keep that tongue of yours still. Mind your rifle, Ned, and come with me."

The young man gave the hand of Ruth a warm pressure, and whispered a word of assurance in her ear. Then he allowed her to pass on, while he came and stood by the side of the scout, who did not stir out of his tracks until the others had moved on some dozen yards or more.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Find out how many red-skins there is behind us, and shoot 'em all if we can. You see that big tree yonder. Well, get behind it, and shoot the first red-skin that shows himself. I'll 'tend to the next one, that comes to hand. We've got to fight 'em here, or the gal is Rushing Water's, and we lose our scalps in the bargain."

"I am ready," answered Ned. "I had rather die a dozen deaths and see her a corpse, than she should fall into the hands of the red-skins."

"I don't doubt it a bit, youngster. But between you and I, I'm afraid our chances are mighty slim. This is a ticklish scrape we're in, and if we all get out of it and save our ha'r, we shall do well. But let's take our places and see who comes along. If the red-skins have kept on track of us, they'll show themselves in a minute or two. Mind that you don't waste a bullet, for ev'ry shot is going to tell in this scrape."

Ned moved to the spot the scout had assigned him, and took up his position behind the trunk of the tree. Dick at once took a similar position, and motionless they waited for the coming of their enemies.

One, two, five minutes passed, and there was no sign of their coming.

Could it be that the scout had been mistaken? Though it was dark it was impossible that they should pass them without making their presence known.

Two minutes more passed and then a flood of moonlight poured down upon the spot.

So sudden did it come, that for a moment it almost blinded the eyes of Ned, with its brilliancy. But they became used to it in a moment, and glancing back along the way they had come, he saw a savage within two rods of him.

He was moving slowly forward, half-bent to the earth, seeking for their trail.

A better chance for a shot a man never had; and remembering the injunction of the scout, he raised his rifle and took deliberate aim upon the savage.

The next instant he pulled the trigger, and the sharp report of his rifle startled the echoes of the forest while the bullet sped on its deadly work.

It did it well, for the savage gave a leap into the air, and then fell forward to the earth, where he lay as motionless as a log.

Another instant, and a second report mingled its echoes with that of the first.

The eyes of the scout had singled out another enemy, and another bullet had sped forth on its deadly mission.

But an exclamation of chagrin fell from his lips a moment after.

"I believe I've missed him. What's the matter with you, Susannah? But like's not the fault's in me. He was some ways off and the moonbeams danced so that I wa'n't over sure of my aim. But I'll have him yet. It won't do to let him bring the rest of 'em here. Keep on arter the rest of 'em, youngster. I'll be back in a minute."

Hastily reloading his rifle he sprung in the direction of the spot where he had seen the savage, leaving Ned standing in his tracks putting another charge into his rifle.

When he neared the spot where the savage had stood, he found that it was untenanted.

But a glance upon the earth told him that his shot had not been so poor a one as he had thought.

The leaves were covered with blood, telling that he had wounded him.

As he saw this he felt better in his mind.

It was seldom he missed an object he took aim upon, and he was fearful he was losing his art.

"He bleeds like a stuck li-on," he muttered, to himself. "He can't have gone a great ways. I'll make sure of him anyway."

A bloody trail led away from the spot, and along this he hurried.

For some twenty rods he had no difficulty in keeping it, and then the moon went under a cloud and he was at fault.

Impatiently he stood still, waiting for it to show its face again.

Five, ten minutes passed, and it gave no symptoms of doing so.

He began to grow impatient, and to think if he had not better turn back and rejoin his friends, and hurry them onward as fast as possible.

"Let him go," he muttered, to himself. "I guess he's done for, so he won't trouble us again. But I would like to have made sure of him."

He gave one more glance up to the clouded sky, and then along the way the wounded savage had gone. Then he turned upon his heel and set his face once more in the direction of the spot where he had left the fugitives.

But he had not taken ten steps in that direction before he gave a sudden start and then stood as though rooted to the spot.

As well he might, in the alarm and surprise he felt.

A fierce war-whoop, breaking as from a score of throats, resounded through the arches of the forest.

It came from the direction of the very spot where he supposed his friends must now be.

The next moment he had sufficient proof that in this he was not mistaken.

A wild cry of terror and alarm, followed the shout of the savages, and then the report of a rifle, and soon after, that of a pistol.

The cry came from the lips of Mrs. Wilson and Ruth, and the shots must be fired by the settler and the Yankee.

The main body of the red-skins must have passed on before so noiselessly that they had not been observed, and these had lain in wait for the fugitives, who, all unsuspecting of danger in that direction, had walked directly into the ambush thus prepared for them.

For only a moment did the scout stand riveted to the earth, as though turned to stone by the knowledge of the fearful danger his friends were in.

The next, he had shot forward as straight as an arrow

from a bow, directly for the spot from whence the tumult arose.

He heard the report of another rifle, which he doubted not was that of Ned, and then two or three in quick succession, which he thought must doubtless be in the hands of some of the savages.

The tumult continued until he was almost to the spot from whence it came, and then it suddenly ceased.

"What could this mean?" he asked of himself, as he came to a sudden halt.

Could it be that the red-skins had slain them all thus quickly?

A fear took hold upon his heart that this was so.

A moment more and his fear was confirmed. Another war-whoop rung out, and went echoing away through the forest-aisles.

It was a shout of triumph.

There was no mistaking that.

It told the scout so, plainer than words could have done.

His worst fears were realized.

All the trouble and fatigue they had undergone that night had been for naught. Their bright hopes of escape were at an end.

Rushing Water had secured the prize he coveted, and a worse fate than that of death was in store for Ruth.

Still, it might be death after all, for had not the Indian girl made a league with the Wizard to accomplish that end?

All these thoughts ran quickly through his mind as he stood there uncertain what to do.

In times gone by he had accomplished much with fearful odds against him; but what could his unaided arm do now against so many?

Perhaps all his friends but Ruth had fallen; but if they had, he would not abandon her. So long as she lived he would work for her deliverance.

But he would not take that shout of triumph as evidence that all was lost.

Something might be done yet, and he would see with his own eyes how matters stood.

So he passed slowly onward, keeping a sharp look-out for the enemy.

The moon and clouds favored him, for no ray of light shot down into the forest.

Noiselessly and with the utmost caution he crept onward, until at last he was close to the spot from whence the various sounds had come.

At that moment the moon broke forth from behind the clouds with a splendor almost like that of the sun.

Hardly a dozen yards before him, he beheld a number of figures clustered together.

By sight he could not tell whether they were all savages or not; but he heard the voice of a woman weeping as though in the depths of despair. But he was not destined to gaze long upon the scene! Hardly had he taken it in, when an arrow, whizzing close to his head, told him that he was discovered.

He gave one of the savages the contents of his rifle, and then turned and fled, muttering, as he did so:

"I'll leave ye now; but the Death-Dealer ain't done with ye yet. He'll make ye pay dearly for this night's work."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAIDEN'S DOOM.

WE will now go back for a few minutes, and note how it was that Ruth and her friends fell into the clutches of the savages.

It will be remembered that the scout told them to move slowly onward in the direction they were going; while he and Ned Tapley attended to the savages whom he had seen hanging in their rear.

These orders they had obeyed, keeping a sharp look-out about them for danger, until the moment when they had been startled by the shots fired by their friends behind them.

Ruth, in spite of herself, uttered a cry of terror at the

sound, fearful that one of the reports might announce the death of her lover.

"Hush!" exclaimed her father, warningly. "Be calm, Ruth. You know that Dick warned us not to speak above our breath."

They were passing now through a little thicket of evergreens, whose branches were so thick above their heads that the rays of moonlight could not penetrate to the earth.

It was as good a place as the savages could have selected for an ambush; but that there was really danger there, not one of them suspected.

That, they were looking for in their rear, where the rifle-shots told them that their friends had already encountered it.

Suddenly the settler, who was leading the way, recoiled as though he had received a blow.

As if by magic, a savage sprung up before him, directly in his path.

The next instant a cry of fear broke from the lips of his wife and daughter.

On either side the forms of a half-dozen savages sprung up so close to them that they could almost have touched them by reaching out their hands.

Unmindful of the hopelessness of their situation, the settler raised his rifle and discharged it at the breast of the savage before him.

But the bullet went wide of its mark, for as he pulled the trigger, a savage upon his right caught hold upon it, and attempted to wrest it from his grasp.

But this he did not succeed in doing, and pulling it from the clutches of the savage, the settler brought it down with such force upon his head as to stretch him senseless upon the earth.

Another savage had sprung upon Peleg Parker, and with one hand had grasped his pack on his back, while the other he entwined in his long hair, and attempted to pull him to the earth.

But the Yankee had no notion of parting with the former, even if he lost his hair, and drawing a pistol he endeavored to shoot down his opponent. But by some mischance it ex

ploded, before he had taken aim, and throwing it to the earth he had recourse to his fist.

"Take that, you thieving varmint!" he cried, as he dealt him a blow between the eyes, that would have felled an ox; "I'll earn ye how to hanker arter other people's property."

The savage went down like a log, but he had so good a hold in the hair of the Yankee that he took him along with him, and they both rolled upon the earth together.

Peleg struggled hard to rise; but before he could do so another savage was firmly planted upon his breast.

Meanwhile Sam Wilson had been assaulted by three or four of the enemy and was at last borne to the earth; and one of them, catching him by the hair, circled his scalping-knife above his head as though he would rob his victim of his scalp, even before he took his life.

But, with a cry for mercy, Ruth threw herself beside the savage, and implored him not to do the fatal deed.

"Take my life, if you will," she cried, "but spare my father. He has never harmed a red-man, and do not have his blood upon your hands."

It was Rushing Water himself to whom she appealed, though she did not recognize him in the darkness.

"And what will the white maiden give if no harm shall be done to her friends?" he said, in a low tone.

Ruth felt a ray of hope steal into her heart at these words.

"Any thing she has," she replied. "If Rushing Water has not a heart of stone, let no harm be done to any."

"The will of the white maiden is law to Rushing Water. The lives of her kindred shall be spared as she asks. But let her remember the promise she has made. The chief will claim it soon."

He spoke a word of command, and coming at that moment it saved the life of at least one of them. An instant later, and the Yankee would have had no farther use for his pack in this world. An arm was even at that moment raised to take his life.

"Do not save me by any such promise as you have made," cried her father. "Think what it is that the chief will re-

quire of you. There is but one thing he desires, and that is to take you to his lodge. Let us rather die where we are, than **this fate should be yours."**

Ruth felt her heart sink like lead in her bosom. But her promise had been given and she would not revoke it. Of what use would it be for her to do so. She was completely in his power, and he would do with her as he chose, even though she stood out against him. Now she had his promise that the lives of her friends should be spared, and that **was more than she had hoped for.**

At this moment there was the report of another rifle, and **a bullet whistled above their heads.**

Our friends knew well it came from Ned's rifle, and that **he was rushing upon his own destruction.**

But there was no help for it. Even before they had a chance to think, he had dashed wildly in among them, dealing blows right and left with the breech of his rifle.

But his career was of short duration. Valiant as he was, he could not successfully contend against such fearful odds, and in less time than it takes to tell it, he was thrown to the earth, where his limbs were secured in such a manner that **he was entirely powerless.**

His life would have been taken in an instant, had it not been for the promise the chief had given to Ruth, and who eagerly reminded him of it when she saw the fearful danger her lover was in.

"Thank God, Ruth, you are alive," cried the young man, as he hopelessly wrestled with his captors. "I was fearful **that you all had perished.**"

"But we are unharmed, Ned. The chief has promised that for the present, at least, our lives shall be spared. Therefore, make no more resistance as it will only be worse for us all."

Sam Wilson heaved a groan.

"But she throws herself away, Ned, to save us. Better by far that we never move from this spot. Oh! that I should have ever lived to see this hour when my child sells herself **to save the lives of her friends.**"

Ned Tapley started up, and strained at the bonds that fettered his limbs with all his strength.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "Ruth, what is it that you have promised?"

"Let the white maiden be still. Rushing Water will answer the pale-face's words. She is to be the bride of the chief. When the Indian village is gained, she will go to his lodge. Let her pale-face friends keep as silent as the dead if they would live. If they do not, the chief may forget his promise and slay them now. The white maiden will be his all the same."

Our friends knew by the tone in which these words were uttered, that the chief meant what he said, and that he would not hesitate a moment to carry out his threats. Therefore, they thought silence on their part was the best thing for them now. It was hard for the settler, or Ned, to contain themselves, yet they saw that they must if they would save their own lives. Something might turn up before the Indian village was reached which would help them to make their escape. As yet the scout was free, and they hoped he would remain so; for it might be that he could achieve their deliverance. If man could do it, they knew he would.

Each silently prayed that he might make good his escape, instead of coming to their assistance now. He could do no good at present, and should he fall into their hands his doom was sealed at once. No power on earth could prevent their taking summary vengeance upon him. The Death-Dealer had sent too many of their braves to the spirit-land, for them to spare him, should they once get him into their clutches.

The work of securing their captives had hardly been completed, when one of them caught a glimpse of the scout surveying the scene before him.

His form was too well known to them; too strange and uncouth to be mistaken, and a flight of arrows was at once sent in his direction, while they bounded forward toward the spot where he stood. A parting shot from him, which made one of them bite the dust, was what they received in return, and then he fled away, while they followed on for awhile, in what they knew, from past experiences, would be hopeless pursuit.

Meanwhile those that remained behind carefully secured those of their prisoners that as yet had remained unbound.

Peleg Parker submitted to his bonds with very ill grace. With his hands bound tightly behind him he felt that he had not so good a hold upon his pack as he could have desired.

In fact now it was at the mercy of the savages whenever they saw fit to explore its mysteries.

That they would find an opportunity to do so sooner than he liked he had no doubt.

He had first tried to coax and then to hire the savages not to bind him.

He was magnanimous enough to offer them two dollars "and the darndest best chance to trade they ever had in their lives" to let him go, but it had no effect upon their hardened natures.

They kept at their work as unconcernedly as though he had not been talking to them as fast as his tongue could run.

At first it had been in a low tone, but as he found he made no impression upon them, he kept raising his voice, until at last it became a whining sort of a howl.

At last Rushing Water thought it was about time for him to stop, and striding up to where he lay he shook his knife threateningly at him.

"Let not the pale-face whine like a licked cur," he said. "If the chief hears more, the coward shall have a knife in his heart."

Peleg thought it best to keep quiet, though he was half tempted to ask him how he would trade the knife he held in his hand for one that he carried in his pack. But the moonlight was shining upon the face of the savage and he saw a look in his eye which told him that it would require but little to make him put his threat into execution.

None of them had been spared the bonds. Even Mrs. Wilson and Ruth were secured the same as their male friends, though perhaps their bonds were a little softer and not drawn quite so tightly. Evidently Rushing Water did not mean that any of his captives should escape him through any fault of his.

In less than half an hour, those who had gone in pursuit of the scout, returned. As their chief expected they came empty handed. None of them were fleet enough to overtake

the Death Dealer. They had tried that game with him before and had always failed. There was not a savage on the river who could keep pace with him when he done his best.

It was now near daylight. A little longer and the short summer night would be gone and the East would grow gray with the coming morn.

The night had been one of toil and excitement to both parties and they felt the need of rest. But Rushing Water decided that they could not have it here. No time should be lost in getting away from the neighborhood of the settlements, where danger might be apprehended should the whites get a clue to what had been going on that night. Once at the Indian village in the stronghold of his tribe he would defy any force that might be sent against him.

Therefore he gave orders for them to start at once, and closely surrounding their prisoners so that there might be no loophole of escape, they set forth upon the long, wearisome way that lay before them.

Rushing Water walked by the side of Ruth and her mother. He did not mean to leave sight of her who had cost him so much trouble.

To the great delight of Poleg, he was made to carry his own pack. One of the savages tried it but found it too heavy for his comfort. But the Yankee would have borne double its weight rather than to have been separated from it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL DIVIDED.

LEAVING the savages to conduct their captives along the toilsome way that led to the Indian village, let us return, and for a time follow the movements of the scout.

Turning his back upon the spot where misfortune had overtaken his friends, he struck off at a round pace through the forest, with the red skins following at his heels.

He had little doubt but that he would be able to distance

them in the race, though he was by no means so fresh as he might have been. .

Since morn of the previous day, no food had passed his lips, and as the reader is aware he had undergone a great deal of fatigue.

Still he did not doubt but what he could easily leave the savages behind him.

And this he did. Before twenty minutes had passed he had left them so far in the rear, that he could hear nothing of them, though he paused and listened several times for the sound of their footsteps.

"You ain't got the Death-Dealer into yer clutches yet," he muttered to himself. "He's going to live to stop a good deal more of yer deviltry. You've done pretty well to night, but you ain't out of the woods yet. You've got a good deal of trouble still, afore you settle down to housekeeping, Mister Red-skin. I don't know but what I am mistaken, but I think I shall have a hand in settling your hash myself. I've only turned my back on ye for a little while. I shall be in yer company ag'in full as soon as you'll want me I guess."

Thus communing with himself he went on slowly, stopping every now and then to hearken for his pursuers. But there was no sign of them now.

Evidently they had given over the race, and returned to the spot from whence they started.

Though assured of this the scout went on still further. He went on aimlessly. He was bound for no particular place. He only wanted to get so far from the savages that there would be no danger of their coming up with him, while he stopped and refreshed himself. Though he had been up thus much of the night he did not feel the want of sleep, for he had got enough of that the day before. But he did begin to feel a little hungry, and this demand of his appetite he determined to gratify as soon as he should be at what he considered a safe distance from his enemies.

With this object in view, he went on for more than a mile from the spot where he had seen the last savage. By this time daylight was breaking, and he felt safe in setting about the work he had in hand. Keeping his eyes about him, he soon caught sight of a noble deer, attempting to flee away

before him. Raising his rifle he brought it down before it had taken a dozen leaps ; and then reloading his piece, he approached the spot where it had fallen.

To set a fire brightly burning, and to flay the deer, were but the work of a few minutes with him ; and in a little while he had a huge slice of it roasting over the coals, the smell of which would have been grateful to any man even if he had not broken his fast for the last twenty-four hours.

All the while he kept a sharp look-out about him for danger. He did not know but the report of his rifle might attract the savages toward the spot, though he felt very sure that those in pursuit of him had long since turned back. But there might be others prowling around in that section, who might seek to find out who it was that had fired the shot.

But no one came to disturb him while he ate his fill of the venison ; and when his hunger was satisfied he cut other large slices from the deer, which he proceeded to roast in the same manner he had the other. When he had quite a quantity prepared in this way he made it into a compact parcel, and bestowed it about him, so that he would have something by him to appease his hunger, should he be placed in such a way that it would be next to impossible for him to procure it as he had now done.

It seemed too bad to leave the remainder of the deer there for the wild beasts to feast upon, but there was no help for it. So he consoled himself with the thought, that there were plenty more of its like in the forest, so that none need suffer for the needless waste he had made, and then bethought himself of what was next to be done.

For a little time he hesitated which of two courses to pursue, in the work he had laid out for himself.

It was no slight task as he knew to wrest the captives out of the clutches of Rushing Water, with none but his own arm to aid him.

Yet this he was firmly determined to do.

Many were the conflicts he had had with the red-skins, and as yet he had always come out victorious in the end.

He knew very well that Rushing Water would set out at once for the dwelling-place of his tribe, and he hardly

thought that he would pause until he got there, so anxious would he be to place Ruth where there could be no possibility of her escaping him.

He knew, also, that he must rescue her between now and the time she should reach there, if he did so at all.

Once there and a new danger would threaten her.

The Indian girl, in her jealous rage, would soon find some way to administer to her the deadly potion the Wizard had promised to prepare for her.

He knew well the way to the Indian village, and the point he was now trying to decide in his mind was this :

Should he hurry on before them for a considerable distance, and lay in wait for their coming ? or, had he better now take the trail and follow on behind them, watching for the opportunity he sought ?

The latter they might mistrust he would do, and so some of the red-skins lay in ambush for him.

For some time he revolved this question in his mind, and then decided upon the latter course.

He thought this the best way to accomplish his purpose, and he would keep his eyes open for danger.

He knew that they stood in fear of the Death-Dealer, and that they would give him a wide berth, unless by their numbers they hoped to match his cunning and the strength of his arm.

His course decided upon, he leisurely took his way back in the direction he had come.

He was in no hurry to reach the spot of the recent conflict, for he knew that even though they had three or four hours the start of him, he could easily come up with them before nightfall, until which hour he knew that nothing could be done.

So he went on at a slow pace, and the sun was nearly three hours high in the heavens, when he arrived at last at the spot where he had last seen his friends in the hands of the red-skins.

He did not expect to find a living soul there, and in this he was not mistaken.

The spot was as silent as the grave.

But he had had his fears that he might find the mangled

remains of some of his friends lying there, but to his joy he found that this was not the case.

All of them had been spared for a short time at least.

A trail as plainly perceivable as the sun in the heavens, led away from the spot, and he lost but little time in setting off upon it.

From the appearance of the ground he had made up his mind that they had not tarried long on the spot after they had secured their captives, and therefore they had several hours the start of him.

But this did not disturb him any. He knew they could not hurry the women along very fast, so it would be an easy task for him to overtake them by the time he desired to do so.

So he struck out upon the trail at his usual gait, feeling sure that by the time the sun went down he would have come up with them.

He had no difficulty in keeping the trail. It lay broad and plain before him. The red-skins had made no effort to conceal it. Perhaps they thought they could not hide it from him if they tried to do so; and then they may have thought that there would be little likelihood of his attempting to follow them. He had fled away before them, and they could hardly think that he would have the hardihood to return and contend with the odds against him.

Only once during the day did he pause for a little rest. On the bank of a small stream he sat down when the sun was at its meridian and partook of a portion of the food he had prepared that morning. As yet he had found no sign where the savages had paused for rest or refreshment, and he knew that the captives must be well-nigh worn out for want of both.

The sun was hardly more than two hours high when suddenly the scout paused, and looked about him with a puzzled look. The trail parted here.

This was something that he had not counted on. What reasons could the savages have had for parting? Could it be, that, fearing pursuit from him, they had done so for the purpose of misleading him?

Or did Rushing Water wish to separate Ruth from her friends?

The scout was puzzled to decide which, but so long as it was done it did not matter so much why.

Carefully he examined the ground for a short distance along either of the branches of the trail, and at last he was able to determine how the prisoners had been divided between them.

The largest body had taken along with them all save one.

This the footprints showed to be a woman ; and was either Ruth or her mother.

He at once decided that it was the former.

A sudden suspicion occurred to his mind.

Had not Rushing Water separated them for some fell purpose of his own ?

Though he did not know it, yet he felt sure that Ruth had purchased their lives, by some promise she had made the savage.

Had she not done so, they would most assuredly have slain them all, as soon as they had them in their power.

That this was the intention of the chief, he knew from what he had heard the Indian girl confess to the Wizard.

Now, instead of taking them to the village, he had separated them from Ruth, but for what purpose ?

He had a strong presentiment that they were led away for sacrifice.

The more he thought on the subject the more convinced he was that he was right, and the stronger were the fears he felt for their safety.

For a few minutes he hesitated, unable in his mind to decide what course to pursue.

He wished to follow on, and try and rescue Ruth before she should reach the Indian village ; but if he did this he must abandon the others to their fate.

He knew that she was not in immediate danger, while the others might even now be falling beneath the blows of the savages.

He hesitated no longer.

It was his duty to try and succor those in the most imminent danger, first.

After all it might prove that he was mistaken, but it was impressed upon him that he had decided right.

With one more glance at the trail plainly marked by the footprints of Ruth, he took the other, and hurried on at the top of his speed.

He felt now that the lives of at least three depended upon his movements, and that it was no time to let the grass grow under his feet.

The sun sunk lower and lower as he bounded onward, and at last it was hidden by the treetops.

Night was now fast coming on, and the trail would be hidden from his gaze.

Little more than a half-hour of daylight remained to him, and every instant of the time must be improved, if he hoped to accomplish the work he had laid out for himself.

As soon as the darkness was down it would be impossible for him to follow the trail.

He would have to wait until the moon rose, and even then it would be uncertain if he could keep it.

And then when he should come up with them it might be too late for him to strike a blow in their behalf.

The sun went down, and the last rays of its light died out of the forest.

The dusky shadows of evening took their place, stealing upon him almost before he was aware of their presence.

It was all that he could do to mark their footsteps now, among the withered leaves.

For once in his life the scout felt nervous, and fearful that he should not accomplish the work he had laid out for himself.

"I'd give a good deal for one more hour of daylight," he muttered, to himself, as he made sure that he was going right by bending down close to the earth.

"Consarn it all, I bothered too long this morning. If I had thought that the redskins had been up to this game, I would have been upon their heels before now."

He went on, but slowly, until at last the darkness was so great that it was impossible longer to make out the trail.

"I've got to wait till the moon rises," he said to himself. "'Tain't no use to try and get on in this way. But what is that? A light ahead, as sure as I'm alive. Fortin ain't de-

asserted ye yet, Dick. But ye've got to keep yer eyes and ears open. You've got a work afore ye that it won't do to blunder in. The red-skins will give more for yer scalp than they will for any other on the S. ioto. You've got to mind, Dick, and keep it under yer cap and then it will be safe."

Communing thus with himself, the scout moved cautiously forward toward the spot from whence the light proceeded.

It was on the line of the trail he had followed, and there was no doubt in his mind that it marked the spot where the savages were.

With footsteps so light that they gave out not the slightest sound, he approached to within a half-dozen rods of the spot from whence the light proceeded.

Here he paused and took in the scene which lay before him.

In a little hollow a camp-fire was kindled, and about it he counted seven savages.

The body of a deer lay beside it, and they were engaged in cutting huge slices therefrom and roasting them over the fire.

The light of the fire flashed out upon either side, but to the dismay of the scout, he could see nothing of the captives on either hand.

A sudden fear took possession of his mind.

Could it be that he was too late?

Had the red skins already accomplished their terrible work?

Had they slain the captives before they had reached this spot, and had he passed them in the darkness?

He shuddered at the thought and glanced behind him as though he was almost fearful that they might be lying close beside him.

But he saw nothing.

They had disappeared, but where?

With the utmost caution he crept nearer to the fire, keeping well in the shadows of the trunks of the trees which stretched out like giants on either hand.

Hardly a dozen yards now lay between him and the nearest savage.

Suddenly a well-remembered voice broke upon his ear, dispelling all his fears at once

"Jerusalem and the Prophets, but this is a hard one! I wish to mercy I was to him in New Hampshire. I'm as hungry as a b'r, and that 'ere meat smells as good as aunt Nancy's baked beans used to, when I was a boy. Don't you think they mean to give us a mouthful?"

The scout glanced toward a spot where the shadows fell the thickest about the fire, and there he saw the outlines of his friends' forms, bound to the trunks of the saplings standing there.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH-DEALER AT WORK.

THE scout had never fancied the voice of the Yankee or what he had to offer; but now it was real music to his ears, for it told him that his fears were groundless, and that his friends were yet alive.

He stood motionless trying to catch what might be said in answer to this complaint on his part, but the rest of the captives were silent.

"Have all of ye lost yer tongues?" he exclaimed, a minute later, "and ain't ye got any appetite? I declare I'm as hungry as a mill-saw. Say, Mister Red-skin, ain't you going to share that 'ere meat with us? Do the fair thing by us, and I'll give ye a good trade arterwards. I've got some 'tarnel nice things in my pack, jest what you want for yer wives and sweethearts. It'll make their eyes stick out to see the ribbons and beads I've got. Be kinder nuberly now and give us a hunk of that. I swan it makes my mouth water to look at it."

"How can you think of eating, when you know not but what this may be the last hour we've got to live?" said the voice of Sam Wilson. "From what the chief said when he parted us from Ruth, I do not think that they mean for us to see the light of morning. I wish that we had died fighting for our lives when they first came upon us, instead of trusting to the promise of a savage. Ruth, then, would at least

have died with us, and so been saved from a fate far worse than death."

A sob of anguish from the lip of a woman, told the scout how the heart of Mrs. Wilson was torn with fears for her child.

"Now you don't really believe they mean to kill us, do ye?" cried the Yankee. "I guess if wuss comes to wuss, I kin hire 'em not to. I believe if I had a chance to show 'em what there is in my pack, I could bribe 'em to let us go. But I declare if I was going to be killed I should rather have the job done on a full stomach. Oh, dear! why in creation did I ever come out into this heathen country. I shall be ruined, I know I shall, afore I get out of it."

"And I hope you will, you 'tarnal fool," muttered the scout to himself. "At any rate, I hope that pack of his will go under. I do believe he'd rather see 'em all murdered than to lose that."

The wish of the Yankee was gratified at length. After eating their fill, the savages offered a portion of what was left to the captives. Mrs. Wilson could not touch a morsel, and her husband and Ned partook but sparingly. But the Yankee made up for them. He eat all that was offered him, the moment his hands were set at liberty so that he could do so, and begged that which they refused. When at last he was through he declared that he felt better, and that if any of them wanted to trade, he was ready for them. But for this the savages were not apparently inclined, and his arms were at once secured behind him in the same manner as before, much to his discontent and disgust, especially when he saw one of the savages lay hands upon his pack, and bringing it close to the fire, undo it, and begin to display its contents to his comrades.

In vain it was that he called upon them to desist. They were deaf to his entreaties, and when at length his voice was raised to a high pitch, one of the savages sprung from the earth, and grasping his tomahawk, he whirled it about his head, threatening him with instant death if he made again the slightest sound.

After this the agony of the Yankee was ludicrous to behold. He dared not speak, and as he saw his treasures one

after another in the hands of the savages, there was the most doleful expression upon his face imaginable. Of his own safety and that of his companions he gave not a thought. He could think of nothing but the financial ruin to which he would be subjected, did he lose his stock in trade, as he was apparently about to do.

All this that was passing about the fire was observed by the scout. Nothing escaped his eye from the place of his concealment behind the trunk of a giant tree. There, silent and immovable as the tree itself, he stood waiting for the moment to come when he could strike for the deliverance of the captives. To him, each savage about the fire was doomed. In his own mind he had surely decreed their death.

His plan for their destruction was laid, and when the proper moment came, he had no fears but what he should carry it into execution.

More than the number now before him had died by his unaided arm, on occasions before this.

The minutes glided on and told the hours, and at last the evening was well advanced.

Satisfied at last with their inspection of the peddler's pack, the savages replaced its contents—much to the relief of the Yankee—and after assuring themselves that the captives were firmly held in their thongs, they gathered about the fire for rest.

From his hiding-place behind the tree, the Death-Dealer watched their every movement.

He saw that the moment for action had nearly come—the time for the deliverance of his friends was close at hand.

He knew that the savages had been without sleep the night before, and when once they were buried in slumber they would not easily awaken.

Minute after minute went by, and at last the savages were as motionless as though they were held in the icy fetters of death. Then, with his rifle in his left hand, and his knife firmly clenched in his right, he glided from his hiding-place behind the tree, and moved noiselessly toward the camp-fire.

Only a pale light flashed out from it now. The flames had gone down, and a few smoldering embers alone marked

the spot where it had been, revealing but partly the forms of the savages outstretched beside it.

The forms of the captives were hidden in darkness, but he had marked well where they were, and could have laid his hand upon them with his eyes shut.

Closer and closer he crept toward the unconscious savages.

He had doomed them all to death, and he was fearful lest some one of them should escape him.

When within a couple of yards of the spot where they lay, the one nearest to him stirred.

In an instant he was as motionless in his tracks as though he had been turned to stone.

Could it be that the savage was awake, and that his quick ear had detected his footsteps?

But no; the savage only turned a little, and then lay as motionless as before.

Two more strides and the Death-Dealer stood by the side of his victim.

His right arm was upraised, and the next instant it descended, and the knife was driven to the hilt in the breast of the red-skin.

Not so much as a groan escaped his lips. There was a slight convulsive motion of his frame and then all was still.

The Death-Dealer had struck his first blow strong and well.

Stepping over the body of the lifeless savage, the scout aimed a blow at the next who lay beside him.

His aim was as true as the other had been, and the spirit of the savage followed that of his companion to the happy hunting-grounds of his tribe.

Still not one of the warriors stirred. Buried in deep sleep they lay unconscious of the presence of their terrible enemy.

Another blow descended, and another savage went the way of his dead companions.

Three had fallen, while the remaining four still lay unconscious of their fate.

Once more the knife descended to its deadly work and another savage was numbered with the slain.

At that moment from some cause or another, a bright flame shot up from the smoldering embers, illuminating the scene about it.

It did not have the effect of awakening the surviving savages, but the next moment a voice exclaimed, in startling tones:

"Jerusalem and the Prophets! What in nater is going on here, I'd like to know!"

The voice was that of Peleg Parker, and so shrill was it, that it brought each of the surviving savages to his feet.

The scout saw his danger, and inwardly cursed the unlucky tongue of the Yankee. But with the rapidity of lightning he sprung upon the nearest warrior and plunged his knife into his heart.

With a howl the Indian fell backward to the earth, with the knife still in the wound, for the scout could not spare the time to withdraw it.

The next instant a tomahawk whistled past his head, so close that it seemed as though it had grazed the skin, but left him unharmed.

Quick as thought he brought his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger.

Quick as his aim had been, it proved a true one, and the red-skin fell with a bullet through his brain.

One only of the seven was left, but at a glance he had taken in the fate of his comrades, and as if struck with horror and the certainty of his own death did he stay to do battle with the terrible Death-Dealer, he turned and fled.

A shout of exultation broke from the lips of the scout as he saw himself thus master of the field, and it was echoed in glad tones by the captives, who were thus assured of their deliverance from the hands of their enemies.

At this moment the moon which had risen some time before, now managed to throw a flood of silver light down through the branches overhead, so that the spot where the scout stood was brilliantly illuminated, and they were able to recognize him and to see the work he had performed.

"Thank Heaven, it is the scout!" cried Mrs. Wilson, as he advanced toward the spot where they stood, after he had assured himself that the fleeing savage meant to make them

further trouble. "Oh, if Ruth was only with us now, how happy I should be. But, alas! I fear that I shall never see her more in this world."

"And I guess you will if you only live long enough," said the scout, as he cut the cords and set her free. "I'll have the gal out of the clutches of Rushing Water afore I'm two days older, or else I shall never go for another red-skin."

"God grant that you may!" exclaimed the parents and Ned in a breath.

"And I say amen to that," said the Yankee. "But look here, mister, jest cut these 'tarnal strings, will ye? They've nigh about cut into the bone, I du believe."

"You said amen afore you ought to jest now," muttered the scout, as he paid his attention to the thongs that bound Ned. "You had ought to wait till you get through afore you call out. If you had done it a minute sooner you would have spoiled the whole."

"Jerusalem and the Prophets, who could help it?" cried Peleg. "I should as quick have thought of seeing Satan himself there among the red-skins as you at that time. But du cut these 'tarnal bonds, will ye? I'm mighty anxious 'bout my pack thar. I'm afraid the varmints carried off something that belonged to me."

"I guess thar didn't more than one of 'em carry any thing a great ways. But I do believe that if the red-skins were a-scalping ye, you would want to save yer pack in some way; and I guess it is a darned sight more precious than your body. If it ain't, it ain't worth much."

Despite the entreaties of the Yankee, he was the last one he freed from his bonds, and no sooner were his limbs at liberty than he started off at once for the spot where the pack was lying, so eager was he to be assured that nothing had been taken therefrom. There couln't have been very well, for his eyes had been upon the savages at the time they had been engaged in looking it over, though he had been obliged to hold his tongue for fear that he might lose his scalp.

The joy of the captives at their escape was great; but their hearts were sad when they thought of Ruth, who was being hurried along by her savage captor toward the lodges of his

tribe, even if by this time they had not already arrived there.

In response to their inquiries, the scout told them of his motions since he had parted with them, which are already known to the reader, and then he demanded to know why it was that Rushing Water had separated them from Ruth.

In a few words they told him of their surprise and capture; of the death that threatened them, and how it was averted by the promise of Ruth, and also of the pledge the chief had given. But as they went onward toward the Indian village he seemed to repent of the promise he had made, and at last determined at least that they should not go thither. Neither would he set them at liberty, for fear that they might try to rescue Ruth.

They were almost sure that they heard him give orders for their destruction, and then Ruth was torn from them, and they went their respective ways.

Hope of escape they had none, for they thought that unaided, he would be powerless to afford them assistance, even if he had escaped, which they were by no means sure of. Aid they could expect in no other way, as they could do nothing of themselves, and hope had well-nigh deserted them.

While these several narrations had been going on the Yankee had carefully examined his pack, and now, with it upon his arm, he approached the spot where they were standing.

"The darned snips didn't get any thing," he said. "I 'spected nothing but what I was ruined when I see 'em afoul of it. I'm mighty glad they've gone under for they had no business to meddle with what didn't belong to 'em."

"I'm glad for your sake," said Ned, trying, but not succeeding, in restraining the look of scorn upon his face, which the moonlight might reveal to the Yankee. "I'm glad it's all right, for you seem to think more of it than you do of your life, or all of us put together."

"Wal, I can't say but what I do. In there is every darned cent I'm worth in the world, unless it is my part of the old rocky farm in New Hampshire. 'Thar's about a hundred

acres of that, but when the old folks drop off, it's got to be divided between thirteen of us. 'Thar's Stephen, Solomon, Daniel, Joshua—"

"Don't go any further!" cried Ned. "I don't wonder you want to keep your pack. Stick to it as long as you live, and I hope it will be the making of your fortune. But now, Dick, what is to be done? We're wasting time here. I'm anxious to be at work."

"So am I," exclaimed Peleg. "I'm losing more'n a dollar a day. 'Thar ain't any trade in any of ye, and I shall be glad when I get back, so that I can be earning an honest penny. I wish to gracious that I was in Smith's Settlement this very minute."

"So do I," cried the scout, angrily, "or anywhere else where I should never hear that tongue of yours ag'in. Won't you try if you can, and keep it still for five minutes?"

Peleg gave a low whistle and was silent.

"Yes, Ned, you are right," said the scout. "We are losing time here. We've got now to find the other trail, and do our best to get the gal out of the clutches of Rushing Water. I 'spects we've got a ticklish job to do it, 'specially if he gets her to the village afore we come up with 'em. But we'll do it, or the folks on the river sha'n't see our faces ag'in."

"I hope we may," said Sam Wilson. "But I know that we've got no easy task before us. If she was only with us now, there is nothing in the world that I would not give."

"Or I," said Ned.

"But wishing won't bring her here," said the scout. "It will take strong blows like them I've give to-night to fetch her, and I wouldn't wonder if as many more red-skins had to go under as you can see stretched out there. Rushing Water has set his mind upon the gal, and he'll keep her if he can. But he'll find trouble in doing it or I miss my guess. But there's danger to the gal, too, that she don't know of. That red gal, who has a claim on him, will do all she can to get her out of the way."

Mrs. Wilson shuddered, and uttered a cry of grief and alarm, at these words of the scout. In the hurry and excitement of the last twenty-four hours she had forgotten this

danger of which the scout had spoken, when he had first warned them of their danger. To save her from this they must rescue her before she should enter the lodge of the chief.

"What do you propose to do now?" asked Sam Wilson, anxiously.

"Start off at once, and hit the other trail as soon as we can. But I'm mighty 'fraid that we shall miss it, with only the moonlight to show it to us. If we do, nothing can be done till daylight, and by that time they will have got to the village."

"Then let us start at once. Every moment we linger here makes the odds greater against us."

"I'm ready," replied the scout. "I wish, marm, that you were safe at the settlement, but you ain't and so will have to go with us. But we will do our best to take care of ye. If the woods wa'n't full of savages you and the peddler might try and get thar, but I'm afraid for ye to try it."

"So am I," said the Yankee. "But I'm losing money every step I follow ye round. This 'ere scrape will be the ruination of me as sure as preaching."

The scout muttered something beneath his breath, the burden of which was, that he hoped it would, and then he turned to Sam Wilson and said, half-hesitatingly:

"I have half a mind that you leave Ruth to Ned and me, and make the best of your way with your wife and this fellow here to the settlements. If you kept a sharp look-out I think that you could do it, and perhaps it would be best all round in the end."

"No; I can not go back and leave Ruth in the hands of these red-skins. I must do what I can to help to save her. Don't ask me to do this. Lead the way on at once, and if we are of no service to you, we will be no drawback."

"That we will not," said Mrs. Wilson. "If I only had a weapon, I think I could strike a blow for her deliverance myself."

"You may have one of my pistols, marm, if you want it," said the Yankee. "I can't use 'em both at once, and I'm always ready to oblige."

No reply was made to this generous offer of Peleg. Hardly a dozen more words passed between them, and then the scout led the way again through the moonlit forest. The task of rescuing Ruth had begun.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Horn fairly abandoned the heart of Ruth when she was separated from her friends, and obliged to go on her way with Rushing Water with none of them beside her.

In vain it was that she had implored him not to separate her from them ; to remember the promise he had made her, when they had fallen into his hands.

Her prayers and entreaties had no effect. He had promised, he said, that their lives should be spared them, and he had kept his word.

He had not said that they should remain in her company, and it was not his will that they should do so, any longer.

He wished for none but her whom he had chosen for his bride beside him, so he had sent the others away.

A terrible fear took possession of her mind, that he had sent them apart to take their lives, that it might not be done before her very eyes.

Filled thus with terror and despair, she went onward, while every step her strength seemed to fail her, while her heart lay like lead in her bosom.

Through the rest of the day until night came on, she managed to keep her feet, but when the shadows gathered thick in the forest she sunk down upon the earth and declared that she could go no further.

A short halt was made here, in which some food was prepared and offered her ; but she could not eat a mouthful.

It seemed to her that it would have choked her, but she attempted to swallow a morsel.

Finding that it was in vain to urge her to do so further

and seeing also that she was unable to proceed of herself, the chief raised her in his own strong arms, and again they went forward.

He would not feel sure of his bride until he had her in his own lodge and among his own people.

So long as they were in the forest, there was a chance that she might be wrested from him.

He knew and feared the Death Dealer, and it was in part to mislead him that he had divided the party.

He knew that the dreaded scout was a host in himself, and that his deadly blows fell oftentimes where and when they were the least expected by his enemies.

Once among his own people and in the heart of their village, he felt that he would be safe from him, and that there would be no one who could wrest his chosen bride from him.

So all through the first hours of the night he hurried onward. The moon rose and climbed high into the heavens and when it had reached the zenith, the village was gained, and with his almost unconscious burden in his arms he stood before his lodge.

No human being save his companions were stirring about him, and with a word he sent them to their several lodges, and then lifting the skin that hung in the doorway he bore Ruth within his own.

A lamp of rude construction, swinging from the roof, and which emitted a pale light, half dispelled, half revealed the darkness which filled the lodge.

Squatted almost beneath it, and apparently buried in slumber, though gently swaying back and forth, was an old Indian woman; Nekomis by name, who for many moons had kept the lodge of the chief and prepared his food, when he was not absent in the chase or upon the war-path.

Approaching a couch which lay in one corner of the apartment, the chief placed his almost unconscious burden upon it, and then stepping to the side of the Indian woman he said, as he touched her upon the shoulder :

"The fingers of sleep must be heavy upon the eyes of Nekomis, that she hears not the footsteps of the chief when he comes. Let her awake, for he has need of her."

The old squaw awoke with a start and staggered to her feet.

"You were sleeping soundly, good Nekomis," he said. "But wake. The chief has work for you to do."

"The spirit of sleep was heavy upon the eyelids of Nekomis, and her ears were dull that she heard not the footsteps of Rushing Water. But she is awake now and ready to do his bidding. There is plenty of maize and venison in the lodge and it shall soon be ready so that the chief may break his fast."

"Rushing Water is not hungry. It's not to prepare him food that he has roused Nekomis from her sleep. It is that she may care for his pale-face bride whom he has brought hither."

The old Indian woman gave a great start, and her eyes followed the direction of his outstretched hand, as he pointed toward the couch upon which Ruth lay. He did not see her features as her eyes rested upon the form of the girl. If he had he would have seen a look of most malignant hate resting there, which could not help having awoke suspicions and alarm in his breast, and made him fearful for the life of her upon whom he had set his affections.

She did not speak, but stood with her eyes fixed upon Ruth, as motionless as a statue.

Again the words of the chief fell but half heeded upon her ear.

"Let Nekomis wait upon her, and see that she has every wish. Let her watch by her side until the morning comes. Let her stir not from the lodge, for she must answer for the maiden with her life."

Again that look of hate came over the face of the Indian woman. But it was gone in a moment as she answered :

"Nekomis will watch and care for her well. When the chief comes in the morning he shall find her here."

"It is well," answered the chief. "The eyes of Rushing Water are heavy for want of sleep. He will lie down in the outer room till the sunlight comes again. The couch of Nekomis will to-night be as soft to him as his own."

He lifted the curtain which connected the two apartments, and passing out, let it fall behind him. It was the one usually occupied by old Nekomis, and throwing himself upon the couch it contained, he was soon buried in slumber.

The old Indian woman stood where he had left her in the main apartment. Her eyes were fixed upon the form of Ruth, and she never stirred in her tracks more than though she had been made of stone. But a fierce emotion shook her frame, and it was evident that she was laboring under great excitement. But the look upon her face as her eyes rested upon the form of Ruth, told plainer than words could have done the terrible hate with which she regarded her.

At length she turned her face away, and muttered to herself so low that it would have been impossible for her words to have reached the ears of Ruth, even had she been trying to have caught the burden of them.

"The pale face bride of the chief must die. Before the light of the morning sun, she must be in the spirit land. Never will Nekomis see her in the lodge of the chief. Minora is the bride the tribe has chosen for him, and none other shall take her place. She is of the same blood of Nekomis, and she shall never stand aside for one of a hated race. She has willed it to be so, and the great Medicine of the Rocks has furnished the deadly draught. Before the morning light, the pale-face maiden shall have taken it, and shall lay yonder, as pale and white as the winter's snow."

The deadly light in her eyes grew brighter as she muttered this to herself. Evidently she rejoiced in the work of death and vengeance she had before her.

Glancing about again toward her victim, she saw that Ruth had rallied from the stupor which she had seemed to be in, and was now glancing about the lodge as though in search of some one.

It might have been the chief she missed, and she waited for her to speak if she would.

At length her eyes became fixed upon her, and she could see that she was gazing upon her curiously.

As though emboldened by the sight of one of her own sex, Ruth raised her hand and motioned for her to approach.

She obeyed her, and approaching the couch she squatted down by her side.

"Where am I?" said Ruth, with wild eyes, as though she hardly comprehended her situation.

"The pale-face maiden is in the lodge of the great chief.

Rushing Water has sought her in her home, and brought her hither to be his bride."

Ruth covered her face with her hands. She remembered all now. What upon her first awaking from the sort of swoon that oppressed her, had seemed a dream, was reality now. She was hopelessly in the hands of her enemy.

She was silent for a few moments, and then hope whispered again to her heart. Was it not possible that she might escape him even now? Would not her companion listen to her entreaties, and being melted thereby, help her to escape? The hope was a faint one, but there could be no harm in trying. If it amounted to nothing, her situation would be no worse than it was now.

Turning eagerly to the old woman, she said, as she laid her hand upon the brown and wrinkled one of her companion :

"The Indian woman likes not the pale-faces. That the white maiden can see in her eyes. She had rather that the chief of the tribe would bring to his lodge one of his own race. It is only right that she should. Let her help the white maiden to fly. She wishes not to mate with the chief. There is one among her own people to whom she has given her heart. Have mercy and save me from the fate Rushing Water has in store for me."

This appeal she had uttered in a low but earnest tone, as though she was fearful that the sound of her voice might reach the ears of the chief, and now that she was through she gazed up with such an appealing look into the face of her companion that it would seem that none but a heart of stone could resist it.

But it had no effect upon the heart of the wrinkled squaw. She knew that there was no way for her to escape the fate she dreaded, except by that to which she had doomed her. Death would relieve her from it, and that alone. Had she been so disposed she could not have assisted her to escape. The eyes of the chief would have been upon their movement and he would have brought her back, while she would have been doomed to death for her treachery. No. There was only one way by which Rushing Water could be foiled in his purpose, and that was that the white maiden should die.

"Nekomis has heard the words of the white maiden. She has spoken the truth. The Indian woman does not like the pale faces. Their heart is black and evil is in their thoughts. She would see them scalped and their lodges burned above their heads."

So fierce was her looks, and so wild her gestures, that Ruth almost drew back in alarm. But she was glad it was so, for perhaps now she would help her. The Indian woman noticed her start of alarm and she softened a little in her speech.

"The chief has chosen a pale face for his bride, but the tribe like it not. There are maidens fairer among them, than she. If she were gone, the heart of Rushing Water might turn again to them."

"The words of the Indian woman are those of truth," exclaimed Ruth, hopefully. "Help me to escape and all may be well."

"The eyes of Rushing Water are sharp, and his ears are open to the slightest sound. His anger is like the tempest when it is abroad in the forest, and nothing can withstand its fury. But let the white maiden content herself. She shall never become the bride of the chief."

Could Ruth have seen the malevolent look that was upon the face of her companion at this moment, she would have been struck with horror. But her face was averted, and she thought only of the promise her words implied. The hope so faint within her grew stronger, and she exclaimed excitedly:

"Heaven bless you for your words," she said. "But let us lose not a moment's time. Let us flee from this spot while we can."

"The pale face maiden can not stir forth to night. Morning will come too soon, and the chief would be upon her track. When all is well, Nekomis will do what she can for her."

Though disappointed, Ruth would fain accept this promise. The Indian woman alone could help her now, and she must cling to her, and the hope she gave her, and wait until such time as she should set for her to try for her escape.

Let the white maiden seek slumber now. She needs it.

to make her strong. Nekomis will watch by her side and see that no harm shall come to her."

Ruth sunk down wearily.

"I must trust you," she said. "I do need sleep, and will try to seek it. But first give me some water. I am very thirsty."

The old woman arose and turned away from the couch. The moment for which she had waited, had come. The fatal draught which the Wizard had prepared could be given now.

Her hand trembled as she took the vessel that contained it, and brought it forward to the couch. Ruth rose up and took it from her hand. Her mouth was parched and dry, and she drained it eagerly to the very dregs. Could she but have seen the look upon the face of the Indian woman she would have dropped it as a thing of death. A look so exultant, and so full of gratified rage would have struck terror to her very soul.

But she saw it not; handing back the vessel to her attendant, she sunk down again upon the couch, where she lay as motionless as one dead.

Not once thereafter did she move so much as a hand; but sunk into a deep, unbroken slumber, from which no sound or word could have awakened her. The old Indian woman sat by her side with her sharp, snake-like eyes fixed upon her face. Little by little her breath grew fainter, until at last it seemed to have left forever her pallid lips. The fatal draught had done its work, and she lay as cold and motionless as though formed of ice.

Then with an exultant look upon her face, the Indian woman arose, and with noiseless step, glided forth from the lodge.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH HER?

ONCE out into the night, she hurried to another lodge standing but a short distance away. Arrived at the entrance she lifted the curtain and entered without ceremony.

It was so dark within that she could see but little; but she appeared to be familiar with the way, and a few steps brought her to the side of a couch upon which the dim outlines of a form could be seen lying.

Stooping down she whispered a single word:

"Minora."

In an instant the Indian girl was upon her feet confronting her.

"Has the white maiden come?" she demanded.

"The pale-face maiden is lying this moment in the lodge of Rushing Water."

"When did she come?"

"Only a little ago."

"She has come to her death. She must not see the light of the morning's sun. Far better for her that she had died beneath the knife with kindred. Let the fatal draught be given her at once."

"The hand of Nekomis has already held it to her lips, and she has drained it to the very bottom."

"The heart of Minora is glad. She will soon be in the spirit-land."

"She is there already. Even now she is lying on the couch of the chief, as pale and cold as the snow in winter."

"Nekomis has done her work well. Minora will not forget what she owes to her when she goes to live in the lodge of the chief. Does Rushing Water know that the white maiden has left him forever?"

"No. He's dreaming of her now in his sleep. He must

not know it until the Wizard is told, and has come hither. Minora remembers the words he said. Let her fly to his home among the rocks and tell him that the white maiden is dead."

"Minora will go like the wind. Her heart is light now, and her feet will be as fleet as those of the deer. In a little time she shall dwell in the lodge of the chief where she has long wished to be."

The two women passed out into the night, and while Nekomis returned to watch by the side of her lifeless charge, Minora sped away through the forest toward the dwelling-place of the Wizard among the rocks.

Her footsteps in due time brought her to the abode of the Wizard, and the sentinel owl at once gave notice of her approach. No one that ever visited the Wizard, be it by night or day, ever found him asleep, and the Indian girl descried him standing at the entrance of his cavern as though he had not stirred from the spot since her last visit to the place.

She saluted him with profound reverence and then waited for him to speak.

"What has brought the Red Rose to the dwelling-place of the Medicine? Has any of the tribe need of his skill to-night?"

"The Red Rose has come because the great Medicine bade her do so when she could bring tidings of the pale-face maiden."

"And can she to-night?" asked the Wizard, hurriedly.

"The Red Rose has said as much. The pale-face maiden lies in the lodge of Rushing Water."

"Has the fatal draught been given her?" he demanded, quickly.

"Nekomis gave it to her with her own hand. The white maiden drank it to the dregs and she now lies cold in death upon the couch of the chief."

"And does Rushing Water know that he has been robbed of his bride?"

"No. The chief sleeps a deep sleep and will not wake until the rays of the sun are again streaming through the forest. He gave the pale-face maiden to the charge of Nekomis and bade her watch her through the night."

The Wizard was silent for a moment and then he spoke out hastily :

"Let the Red Rose return at once and say to Nekomis, as soon as the darkness has fled away let her call the chief to the couch of the white maiden, that he may see that her spirit has fled to the Shadowy Land. Let her tell him that she knew nothing of her illness till she saw her lying dead ; but supposed that a heavy sleep was upon her. Then will the chief want the Medicine, and he will be close at hand so that he will not have to send hither for him. When the Red Rose has told Nekomis this, let her go to her own lodge. The chief must not know that she has been abroad to-night, or he may think she has had a hand in this."

"The ears of the Red Rose have heard, and her fleet footsteps shall carry the message to Nekomis."

She turned at once and bounded away through the forest, anxious to reach the village before the day should begin to break.

The gray light of the morning had begun to show in the east when she summoned Nekomis from her watch beside the couch of the dead.

Hastily telling her the message the Wizard had sent, she retreated to her own lodge, fearful that the chief might awake and find her there.

Nekomis went back to her place beside the couch and looked upon the pallid face of her victim once. Then she turned away, and lifting the curtain that divided the two apartments, she stood beside the still sleeping chief.

Only for a moment did she hesitate to awaken him, and then she touched him on the face, speaking his name at the same moment.

He awoke with a start, and in a moment was upon his feet, while an anxious look took its place upon his countenance.

"What is it that Nekomis wishes?" he said. "No harm has come to the pale-face maiden, for if there has she shall pay for it with her life."

"Let the chief come out and look upon her. Nekomis thinks that her heart is broken, and that her life has fled away to the spirit-land. She did think that her eyes were

closed in slumber, until the light of the morning came, and showed her as pale and cold as the sun when the winter is here."

Pushing her aside with a force that almost sent her from her feet, the chief sprung into the apartment and to the couch on which lay the lifeless form of her who was so dear to him, and upon whom he had set the highest wish of his heart. One glance at her pallid face told him that Nekomis was not mistaken. Kneeling down by her side he felt that there was no sign of life there. The prize that had cost him so much to obtain, had slipped through his hands when he thought he had it surely in his grasp.

Springing to his feet again, he drew his knife and turned it threateningly upon Nekomis.

"You let her die," he said, "and you shall follow her to the spirit-land. Had you watched her as the panther does its young, you would have seen when the death-sleep began to grow upon her. But you did not, and now the worthless life of an old squaw shall follow hers."

Nekomis folded her hands upon her breast and gazed without fear upon him.

"Nekomis is ready to die," she said. "But let the chief make haste to send her to the spirit-land. Then he can send for the great Medicine, who, it may be, can bring her back to life."

The hand that held the weapon fell down to his side.

"The great Medicine shall come," he said. "Nekomis shall live until he has done his best to bring her back to life. If he can not she shall die then."

He rushed forth from the lodge, and sped away toward the edge of the forest in the direction of the Wizard's dwelling-place. But he had not gone far before to his joy he saw the Medicine coming toward the village. In a moment he was at his side urging him to hasten his footsteps.

In answer to his inquiries, he told him the state of affairs, and then eagerly demanded if there was a chance to hope.

"The Great Spirit holds the life of the red-man and the white in his hand, and he calleth them away whenever he

chooses. The Medicine will do all that he can to bring the pale-face maiden back to life. He knows many charms that work well, and it may be that he can save her. But if the Great Spirit hath taken her away the Medicine can avail her nothing."

They found Nekomis at the side of the couch when they entered, and she stepped back at their approach. Had the chief been less excited he might have noticed a look of intelligence which passed between them. But he did not, and the Medicine approached and bent above the form of his victim.

For the space of two minutes there was a breathless silence within the lodge.

Then the Wizard straightened up and looked into the face of the chief.

"The Medicine is not sure, but he thinks that the life of the pale-face maiden has gone to the spirit-land. If he had her in his cavern among the rocks he might work some charms upon her that might bring her back to life. The way thither is long, but if the chief will bear her there, he will do his best."

"The arms of Rushing Water are strong and his steps are fleet. He will bear her to the home of the Great Medicine, if he will do what he can to restore her to him again. The warriors are not yet astir, and it may be well that the tribe knows not of this. Nekomis will keep the secret, or the knife of the chief will find a way to make her do it."

He gazed threateningly at her as he said this, and then stooping down he raised the form of Ruth in his arms. He shuddered as her lifeless form touched his breast, and then he bore his burden out into the morning air.

There was indeed no one stirring as yet about the village, and they were enabled to gain the cover of the forest without being observed. Thence onward they went as fast as they were able, and by the time the sun was an hour high, they stood before the huge pile of stone that marked the home of the Wizard.

The foot of no savage save his own had ever crossed the threshold, and the chief looked into his face as though to ask if he would be allowed to bear his burden in, and thereby

catch a glimpse of its mysteries. But this he evidently would not admit for he held out his arms, saying :

“ Let the chief give the pale face maiden into the keeping of the Medicine. He will work his strongest charms and do all that he can to bring her back to life. Let him come hither on the morrow at this time, and he shall know whether the Great Spirit has claimed her for his own.”

He took the cold and rigid form of Rath in his arms, and the chief watched him until he had disappeared within the rocks. Then he turned his back upon the spot, and bent his steps once more toward the village.

CHAPTER XII.

WINDING UP THE WEB.

LET us now return to the scout and his companions, and see how it has fared with them since we parted company at the spot where Dick had dealt the blows which delivered his friends from the savages.

The reader will remember that they had turned their backs upon this place ; and had set out to endeavor to find the other trail in the moonlight, in the hopes of following it on, and overtaking Rushing Water before he could reach the Indian village with his captive.

But that they had not succeeded in coming up with them, the reader already knows, for he has seen what passed in the lodge after they had gained it.

Aided by the moonlight, Dick had struck the trail without much difficulty, and they had followed on, as fast as they could under the circumstances.

But the chief and his companions were so far in advance that they stood no show of coming up with them.

In fact the night was far gone when they drew near the Indian village.

Long before they reached this point, the scout had become

satisfied that they were too late, and that if they accomplished their object they had got to do it under more difficulties than had yet beset them.

They had got to penetrate into the very lodge of Rushing Water, which stood perhaps in the very heart of the village.

There would not be time to accomplish this to-night, even if it could be done successfully.

They must lie quiet somewhere in the depth of the forest and wait until the darkness of another night.

They followed the trail almost to the verge of the village, so impatient were his companions to rescue Ruth if the thing lay in their power; and then convinced that it did not, in the remaining hours of that night at least, they were ready to comply with what the scout had to propose.

This was that they should retire back from the village for something like a mile and lie through the day in some darksome covert, where there would be little likelihood of their being discovered by the savages.

This plan was now carried into effect and by the time the day had fairly broke they were snugly ensconced in their hiding-place.

The sun rose above the tree-tops, giving promise of a beautiful day, and over and over again did they wish that Ruth was with them that they might be hurrying toward a place of safety instead of lying idly there.

Fears that she would never be restored to them oppressed the heart of the mother. The chief had her now securely in his power and how were they ever to tear her from his clutches?

It seemed impossible to her that so few of them could do it.

Yet they were determined to accomplish the task before them, or lose their lives in the attempt.

The scout knew that it could not be done by mere strength of arms alone; but more than once had he accomplished his ends by outwitting the savages and he meant to succeed in this way now.

Slowly the minutes went on and higher and higher the sun rose up into the cloudless sky.

Suddenly the sound of a footstep struck upon the watchful ear of the scout.

Glancing hastily out from their hiding-place, he saw a savage slowly advancing toward the spot where they lay.

He did not seem to be seeking for any trail ; but his head was bowed and his eyes fixed upon the earth as though some grave subject occupied his mind.

Sam Wilson's gaze fell upon him a moment after, and as it did so he gave a great start.

"It is Rushing Water," he exclaimed in surprise. "Where is Ruth ? What could he have done with her ?"

"You are right," exclaimed the scout in a whisper. "It is the chief himself. Now, boys, he must not leave us alive ; but we must get him into our hands unharmed, if the thing can be done. When he is close to us we must spring out upon him. If we can get hold on him we are all right. Stand by me, and I guess there is enough of us here to match any savage that ever burned a cabin."

Slowly the savage came on, apparently in deep thought, and unconscious of all that was passing around him. They could see a look upon his face that told something pained and troubled him.

Nearer and nearer he came, and at last the instant arrived for them to act.

Noiselessly they crept forth from their hiding-place and approached their intended victim.

Had he raised his eyes he must have seen them, but he did not.

With a spring like that of a panther the scout bounded upon him, and his enemies followed his example.

The struggle was a short one.

With the odds against him, and taken thus by surprise, the chief could make but slight resistance.

In a minute's time he was thrown to the earth and his hands and feet firmly secured with strong thongs which the scout produced from about his person.

Not a word did the scout utter until this was accomplished, and the wily savage lay a helpless prisoner before them.

Then with his knife held menacingly above his breast, the scout demanded, while the rest of the party with eager looks gathered about them :

"Where is the pale-face maiden? Speak! and let your words be true ones, or you die at once."

"Rushing Water is not afraid to die. The words of the Death-Dealer can not frighten him. He will speak the same as though they were not sounding in his ears. The Death-Dealer is a great warrior, but the chief is not a squaw that he should be afraid of his words."

Mrs. Wilson knelt down by his side and cried, appealingly

"Where is my daughter? Tell me that she is unharmed, and restore her again to my arms, and no harm shall come to you. Only give her back to us, and we will forgive you the loss of our home, and all else that you have done to us."

"The pale-face mother can not have her child again. The chief has not the power to give her again into her arms if he would. The Great Spirit has called her home."

"Oh, Heaven!" cried the agonized mother. "You do not mean to say that she is dead? that you have killed her?"

Ned Tapley drew his knife, and with a face as pale as death, would have sprung forward and plunged it into the heart of the savage, had not the strong arm of the scout held him back.

"Let him speak, youngster," he said. "If he has harmed so much as a hair of her head, we will have vengeance."

"The white maiden did not die by my hand," said the chief, calmly. "The Great Spirit himself called her home. When the daylight came, she lay upon her couch as white and cold as the snow of winter. The Great Spirit himself knows that Rushing Water harmed her not."

A wail of agony broke from the lips of the parents, and Mrs. Wilson staggered and would have fallen to the earth had not her husband supported her.

"But you killed her as surely as though your hand had plunged a knife into her heart, and for this you shall die!" cried Ned, as he made another effort to deal the helpless savage a blow with his knife. But this he was again prevented from doing by the scout, who exclaimed:

"But where is the white maiden lying now? We would

look upon her, that we may know that your words are not lying ones."

"The form of the White Rose lies in the cavern of the great Medicine, beneath the rocks. Rushing Water has carried her there to see if she can not be brought back to life."

"I know the spot," cried the scout. "Let us go there at once, and see whether this red-skin is lying or not. He's bound so securely that he cannot escape us, and we shall find him here when we come back. Let him live till then, that we may know how to deal with him. If by his means Ruth has died, a dozen deaths would not be enough for him."

Ned was the last to assent to this. He was fearful that in some way the chief might escape him. But he agreed to it at last, after he had seen the savage gagged, so that it was impossible for him to call any one to his assistance.

With hearts oppressed by sorrow and grief they hurried away toward the dwelling-place of the Wizard. Arrived there, they found that his brute sentinel had given notice of their approach, and that he was standing in his accustomed place to receive them.

His astonishment was great when he saw who his visitors were, and their errand he divined at once, before the scout could open his lips.

"The pale-faces have come for the white maiden," he said. "It is well. The Medicine is glad to see them. When the sun is half-way home in the sky, she shall go with them."

A cry of joy and gladness broke from the lips of all.

F "Thank God! my child is then alive," cried Mrs. Wilson, **in a tone of joyous thankfulness.**

"The white maiden lives, but her strength has not come back to her yet. But let the pale faces enter so that the eyes of the red-men may not see them. Then the Medicine will tell them all.

They followed him into a sort of outer cavern, which was partly illuminated by a small fire that was burning in one corner. Another passage led further into the rocks, but thither they were forbidden to go. A panther sat therein as

though to guard the mysteries that lay beyond, and who growled savagely at this unwonted intrusion, while perched upon a projecting point of rock over his head was a huge owl who looked down upon them with his great staring eyes, and who ruffled its feathers as though it, too, did not like the appearance of the strangers.

At a word from the Wizard, his companions were mute and motionless; and then he turned toward a couch in one corner, which, owing to the darkness, they had not perceived until this moment.

Stretched thereon was the form of Ruth, and no sooner did Mrs. Wilson behold it, than she sprung forward and clasped it in her arms.

"Ruth, my Ruth!" she cried. "Speak to me."

"Mother," said the girl, faintly. "Oh, I am so glad that you have come," and she twined her arms about her neck.

Each one of the party now presented themselves, and a scene of joyous greeting followed that our pen can not describe.

"How is this?" demanded the scout, turning upon the Wizard. "With my own ears I heard you promise the Indian girl that little Ruth here should die, should Rushing Water bring her to his lodge."

"And so she has to them," answered the Wizard. "I worked for the good of my people and that of the pale-faces at the same time. I knew that the red-men wanted not the chief to take a pale-face for a bride; but he was so set upon it that he would have his own will. I prepared a potion for her, that I knew would make her seem as though the Great Spirit had called her home. Nekomis, the old woman that cares for the lodge of the chief, gave it to her, and then called upon him to look upon his dead bride. He was well nigh stricken with grief, and came for me to try to restore her to life. I had her brought hither, and when he had gone, not to return until the morrow, I gave her another potion which restored her to life. In a little while she will be as strong as ever again, and then you must fly with her, before the chief comes."

"Jerusalem! I guess that won't be till somebody lets him loose," exclaimed the Yankee, who had been staring about

him with all his eyes, and who for a wonder had maintained silence until this.

"What does the pale-face mean?" demanded the Wizard. "The white warriors have not harmed him?"

In a few words the scout told him of the condition in which they had left the chief, and then added, that he desired the Wizard to set him free when it could be done in safety to themselves.

"The white warriors have done well," he said. "The Medicine will see to him. The white maiden shall be as dead to him, and by and by he will wed with Minora, the Red Rose of the tribe, and happiness will come to his lodge again."

"Wal, I swan you've got a long head on yer shoulders," exclaimed the Yankee. "You've planned matters pretty shrewd, I'll be darned if you ain't. But, say, how'll you trade that owl of your'n for some of the notions in my pack? I should like to have him stuffed, and kerry him home as a sort of trophy of this 'ere scrape."

This proposition for a trade, on the part of Peleg, the Wizard declined, and he now turned his attention to the further recovery of Ruth; and so successful was he that in a couple of hours her strength was in a great measure restored to her, and she declared that she was able to commence her homeward journey at any time, when they were ready to depart. This they were glad to do at once, and taking leave of the Wizard, with many thanks on their part for his kind offices, they went forth from the cavern, and set their faces once more toward the settlement.

An hour after their departure, the Wizard stood by the side of the captive chief. He had no difficulty in finding the spot, for the scout had described it so that he could not miss it. He looked up in the face of the Medicine as he cut the bonds that held him, mutely asking the question, the answer he so much feared to hear.

"The white maiden is gone, and none of the arts of the Medicine can bring her back," he said, simply.

"And the pale-faces, her friends—where are they?"

"Bearing her back to their home that the chief made desolate, that she may be near them."

The chief asked no more questions. Turning his back upon the Wizard, he strode away in the direction of the Indian village, fully convinced that the pale-face upon whom he had set his heart, had gone to the spirit-land.

He did not harm Nekomis as he had threatened to. On the contrary she kept his lodge as usual, until, before a year had gone round, he brought Minora to keep it for him. He was happy and contented with her. The Wizard kept his secret well, and none among the savages ever knew of the part he had played.

On through the forest our friends went, rejoicing in their escape from the fiery furnace with hardly so much as a singe upon their garments.

The Yankee clung to his pack, which he had stuck to through thick and thin, and which he was at last bearing out triumphantly. Ruth bore the fatigue well, helped along as she was by the hand and strength of her lover, and in due time the nearest settlement was reached, and they were safe from any further dangers.

Sam Wilson did not return to his clearing, and so the cabin in the wilderness was not reërected.

He had experienced dangers enough from living apart from the body of the settlers, and was now content to abide with them. A piece of land was taken up close to them, and two cabins erected thereon. Not long after they were completed, Ned Tapley and Ruth were married and took up their abode in one of them, while the parents of the latter dwelt in the other.

Rushing Water neither of them saw again. Whether he was ever undeceived they had no means of knowing. Happy themselves, they were willing that he and Minora should be likewise.

Dick, the Death Dealer, was ever a prized friend to them; and they were glad to have him take up his abode with them whenever he was not abroad upon his work in the forest. Many were the timely services he performed for all of the settlers, and he was looked upon as the benefactor of them all.

It may be some satisfaction to our readers to know that the Yankee made one trade with our friends. Ruth's wedding-

dress was purchased of him, and though he said that he was selling it so low for friendship's sake that he was ruining himself, he was afterward heard to chuckle and declare that he had "made a darned handsome thing out of it," as doubtless he had.

Whether he ever went back to New Hampshire is unknown; but whether he did, or remained in the West, there is one thing sure: he looked out for Number One on all occasions, and that he and his pack stuck together through thick and thin.

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- 151-The Branded Brave. By Paul Bibbs. Ready April 6th.
- 152-Billy Bowlegs, the Seminole Chief. Ready April 20th.
- 153-The Valley Scout. By Seelin Robins. Ready May 4.
- 154-Red Jacket, the Huron. By Paul Bibbs. Ready May 18th.

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